‘Inspraak’ – an institutional and historical account of public participation in Dutch planning

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Abstract:
A key point of this paper is the recognition that public participation processes in planning must be viewed in the contextual setting of a country’s institutional characteristics. So far, however, little attention has been paid to the specific institutional settings of public participation in an historical context. The key empirical question for the paper is how the function of ‘inspraak’ as a Dutch type of public participation, has evolved since the 1960s. It explores the evolution of legally based public participation – in the Dutch context referred to as ‘inspraak’ – and the function that Dutch planners and government agencies have attached to its application, and assesses the current relevance of this development.

The history of public participation in the Netherlands has been traced using evidence from literature, policy reports, advisory reports, and recollections of experienced planning practitioners. The evidence from the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and more recent Dutch initiatives towards participatory decision making and communicative planning illustrate an evolution in substantive and instrumental thinking and normative ideas about public participation.

Also, the paper argues that there is no uniformly accepted representation of or agreement on the meaning, forms, and level of public participation. Overall, theorists and practitioners have different points of reference from which to understand the public involvement in planning. The institutional structure and the type of democracy underpinning decision making in a particular context determine the way that public participation should be understood.

In general, the paper reveals that the institutional procedures and formal apparatus of planning highly determine the practice of public participation. This calls for great sensitivity for context when examining matters of participation in planning.
1. Introduction

Amidst ongoing debates in planning theory and planning practice about the positions and implications of (applying) communicative and participatory planning, this paper sets out to examine the institutional roots of existing public participation practices in the Netherlands. We hope to uncover some of its ideological and institutional baggage, and put current new types of public involvement into an historical perspective. We would suspect that the ideological and institutional baggage might be more varied than the current position of legally prescribed public participation suggests. Our paper is an effort to understand the processes of institutionalisation and to establish an overview of the ideas about public involvement that originated from the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, the paper explores the evolution of legally based public participation—in the Dutch context referred to as ‘inspraak’—and the function that Dutch planners and government agencies have attached to its application, and it assesses the current relevance of this development.

Throughout, we define ‘inspraak’ as a form of public participation in which government provides an opportunity for concerned parties to express their views on certain plans or decisions. ‘Inspraak’ is a particular—legally prescribed—type of public participation. Below, we will clarify our definition of ‘inspraak’ further by positioning it against related concepts. For the remainder of the paper we will use the term ‘inspraak’. We thus refer to legally prescribed processes of public involvement in the Dutch planning context. Where appropriate, we will relate our discussion and findings to some relevant international public participation literature.

The central research question of this paper is as follows: how has the function of ‘inspraak’—as a particular form of participation—developed in time? This central question will be answered with the help of the following questions:

- How can the concept of ‘inspraak’ be marked out against other, related notions?
- What is the influence of societal developments on the evolution of ‘inspraak’?
- How did the function of ‘inspraak’ evolve in legislation, policy thinking, and planning practice?

These questions have been answered on the bases of a description of the so-called landmarks in the history of formal public participation. Landmarks are occurrences that either have influenced the reflections on ‘inspraak’ or have lead to changes in aims, expected results, in participation procedures or the method of participation. These landmarks can be divided into:

- Societal changes, as reflected in general societal and political developments;
- Changes in legislation, as reflected in legal provisions and regulations;
- Changes in policy thinking, as reflected in advisory reports and policy documents;
- Changes in planning practice, as reflected in incidents and projects.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The current section will first be finished with a demarcation of the meaning of ‘inspraak’, and a listing of its main arguments and functions. Section Two follows with a research framework. Subsequently, Section Three outlines the evolution of ‘inspraak’ in three time periods. These time periods are, successively, 1970 to 1980, 1980 to 1990, and 1990 to 2000. As a result, Section Four provides a further arrangement of the history of ‘inspraak’ by period. The paper finishes with a synopsis, concluding remarks, and some reflections about the future of ‘inspraak’ and public participation in general.

'Inspraak' as a particular form of public participation

There is no generally accepted definition of ‘inspraak’ or public participation. The meaning of ‘inspraak’ in itself is a part of the life history of public participation. We can, however, mark out the meaning of ‘inspraak’ in contrast to related notions. The conception of public participation can be illustrated by contrasting it to related notions such as participatory decision
making, partnership, participatory dialogue, referendum, legal protection, advice, and communicative planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notion</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Difference with ‘inspraak’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory decision</td>
<td>Collaborative decision making (shared control)</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ follows the rules of representative democracy and is restricted to giving opinion and trying to influence a decision. Eventually, others then take this decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory dialogue</td>
<td>Taking part in discussion (informal)</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ is more than participating in a dialogue without obligations. The responsible administrative body is subject to certain obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>Adopting the wishes of the community (direct control)</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ provides no guarantee that a government agency commits itself to public desires or objections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal protection</td>
<td>Reverting earlier decisions when blatant failures have been made (preventive)</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ precedes the decision and is aimed at possibly changing intended decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Formal) advice</td>
<td>Result of a consensus-building process in advisory bodies</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ provides participants—be it individuals or organised groups—with an opportunity to give their opinion as a private person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative planning</td>
<td>Philosophy about planning involving direct interaction prior to formal decision making.</td>
<td>‘Inspraak’ involves formally prescribed participation for an intended plan or decision.</td>
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It should be clear that drawing an unambiguous line between ‘inspraak’ and related notions is virtually impossible. This is especially true for advice and communicative planning. When public participation involves giving advice by advisory councils in which representatives of interest groups have a seat, then the boundaries between ‘inspraak’ and advice are fairly smooth. The same is true for communicative planning. For this, the legal basis of ‘inspraak’ is an important distinguishing characteristic.

The most important definable characteristics of ‘inspraak’ are:
- ‘Inspraak’ involves public participation about an anticipated decision, although the ultimate decision is taken according to the rules of representative democracy;
- ‘Inspraak’ is not free of engagement. It creates the obligation for the authority that grants ‘inspraak’ to reconsider the anticipated decision. There is no assurance, however, that the wishes of the participants will be adopted;
- In ‘inspraak’, individual or organised participants react personally.

Arguments and functions of inspraak
The literature provides various classifications for the functions of public participation (e.g., Richardson, 1983). The development in the motives and functions of ‘inspraak’ in practice forms a part of this paper. We will provide here a classification of the arguments for ‘inspraak’ that we will use subsequently for positioning the development of the motives in favour of ‘inspraak’ and the functions that are attached to it.

Our classification of the arguments about ‘inspraak’ is founded upon the contrast between the so-called normative and instrumental arguments. Normative arguments involve the question to what extent ‘the citizen’ should be granted the opportunity to participate in decision making. Instrumental arguments implicate ‘inspraak’ as a means to fulfil the needs and interests of government and citizens.
Table 2. Normative and instrumental arguments for ‘inspraak’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative arguments</th>
<th>For government</th>
<th>For citizens</th>
<th>Instrumental arguments</th>
<th>For government</th>
<th>For citizens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>functioning of democracy</td>
<td>Emancipation function</td>
<td>protection of interests</td>
<td>additional source of ideas and information</td>
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<tr>
<td>legitimacy of the decision-making process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>broadening of public support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>prevention of objections and appeal</td>
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We will clarify the content of the table. There are those who value participation as something worth striving for in its own right. The ideal of the capable and empowered citizen is associated with this strand of thought (e.g., Innes, 1996). On the other hand, there are those who view participation as a tool for the improvement of decision outcomes (e.g., Hathway, 1997). Even in that respect, many distinctions can be made. Overall, we distinguish between a normative perspective (with an emphasis on democratic and emancipatory values) and an instrumental perspective (with an emphasis on pragmatic usage). Whereas much of the literature predominantly stresses the normative, democratic and participation related arguments surrounding participatory decision making, policy practitioners tend to take an instrumental position.

The normative arguments for ‘inspraak’ from a government standpoint—which deals with an answer to the question why citizens should have the opportunity to influence decision making—are related to the public demand for democracy. The first argument is that in an active democracy the voice of the citizen should be listened to. The second argument is that ‘inspraak’ is necessary to enlarge the legitimacy of the decision-making process. Citizens generally value ‘inspraak’ for its opportunity to influence decision making. ‘Inspraak’ is seen, then, as something valuable for the emancipation of the citizen itself and because of its educational function for the self-development of citizens.

The instrumental argument of ‘inspraak’ for the citizen—a means to fulfil interests—is related to the prospect of protection of interests. The instrumental argument of ‘inspraak’ for government implies that ‘inspraak’ can be a vehicle for a trouble-free realisation of governmental objectives. ‘Inspraak’ contributes to efficiency and effectiveness because it yields information and ideas, because it enlarges public support for the decision, and thus averts implementation problems, objections, and appeal.

In instrumental terms, participatory decision-making processes potentially have some considerable advantages over other decision-making processes. Overall, the instrumental position considers an investment in participatory decision making to be a way to generate public support, a way to gain time (shorter decision-making processes in the long term), a way to incorporate relevant knowledge (good ideas and lay expertise by participants), and even as a method to gain control (because positions and interests remain transparent). This is also a very pragmatic perspective as participation is put forward as an instrument to incorporate ‘good’ public contributions into the policy-making products and, thus, arrive at effective policy results.

2. Framework

This section provides an outline of the framework that we have used in our attempt to describe and understand the development of ‘inspraak’ in the Netherlands. In our description of this development, we have been searching for landmarks in the societal context, in legislation, in policy thinking, and in planning practice. The description of these landmarks provided a basis for an answer on the question how ‘inspraak’ and the functions that are attached to ‘inspraak’ have developed over time in Dutch planning.
In portraying the developments, we have tried to identify and examine the assumptions and normative and instrumental arguments that were utilised for public involvement. We have also examined the prevailing discussions. Use was made of empirical and theoretical literature as well as policy documents. In addition, we have interviewed twelve experienced planners—who had all been involved somehow in public participation processes since the early 1970s.

The societal context has been of great importance for the way in which ‘inspraak’ has developed in the Netherlands. In this paper we describe the most relevant societal changes for ‘inspraak’ in the social-economic and political-institutional fields, and we describe the changes in views about the role of government and changes in views about the role of (spatial, environmental, and infrastructure) planning.

Another perspective with regard to ‘inspraak’ that we studied is related to the changes in legislation between 1970 and 2000. Investigated is how, especially in administrative law, the possibilities for ‘inspraak’ and procedures have been shaped. It is examined which laws are landmarks within the legislation of ‘inspraak’, and which changes have occurred in the juridical framework of ‘inspraak’. The search for landmarks in law entailed an inventory and analysis of the legal literature. The focus was put on the most important landmarks in law and discussions relevant for planning.

A further study perspective relates to changes in policy thinking. For this perspective, we have studied the memoranda and advisory reports published by the central government between 1970 and 2000. These landmarks indicate why—according to these policy makers—certain policies about ‘inspraak’ should be chosen or changed. Generally, certain assumptions about cause and effect, about the relation between means and goals, and about normative ideas underlie all policies. These assumptions change over time. Normative statements concern the question how people define the meaning of ‘inspraak’ as a problem or solution, and how they perceive its objectives. This definition is liable to change. Also views change, however, about the objectives of ‘inspraak’, and about the question what means and what kind of cause and effect relations are relevant.

The analysis of planning practice, the final perspective that we studied, entails an exploration of projects and incidents that have been landmarks in the thinking about ‘inspraak’. Literature has been examined for projects and incidents that have led to changes in the views on ‘inspraak’ (catalyst) or that have been characteristic themselves for societal or political change (indicator).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Method and source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal developments (social context, role of politics and government, role of planning)</td>
<td>Academic literature, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation (landmarks in rules, procedures, and regulations)</td>
<td>Legal literature, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy thinking (problem definitions, normative and goals-means assumptions in advisory reports)</td>
<td>Policy documents, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning practice (landmarks in plans, projects and incidents)</td>
<td>Academic and professional literature, interviews</td>
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To resume, we start from four angles that we think are relevant to identifying landmarks in the development of ‘inspraak’ as a form of participation. Table Three summarises the different perspectives. It is hard to securely indicate the way in which these four perspectives influence each other. The assumptions in policy thinking are influenced by societal developments and developments in planning practice. Developments in planning practice—such as experiments with public involvement—may often be a response to societal developments. The recommendations and ideas included in advisory reports may ultimately have their repercussion in legislation. Furthermore, policy thinking and legislation could well provide the potential and limits within which ‘inspraak’ can develop itself. In addition, ‘inspraak’ practice could directly
lead to changes in legislation. This is what we aim to find out.

3. The evolution of ‘inspraak’ in three time periods

This section discusses our findings by broadly outlining changes, landmarks, or trends in the development of ‘inspraak’. We distinguish between three periods: 1970–1980, 1980–1990, and 1990–2000. These periods clearly are distinct, but should not be regarded too strictly. We examine the trends for ‘inspraak’ in these three periods from four perspectives (societal, legislation, policy thinking, and practice), as depicted in the Table Four below.

One could of course question the scope of the periods as mentioned above. Indeed, the participation of ‘the public’ in planning is not something entirely new. In the UK, for example, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 already provided regulations for the public to voice their views. These regulations included the compulsorily publication of applications for planning permission and the submission of development plans. Furthermore, there were the consultation of the neighbours of proposals and a public inquiry system. The main instrument for public participation, however, was the election of politicians to represent public interest. This is true for many other western European countries. We feel that the active involvement of citizens, beyond election power, is something of the last three to four decades. We thus follow Ann Richardson (1983), who –writing about the genesis of participation– pointed out that the interest in ‘extending the boundaries of participation’ is essentially a recent phenomenon, set out from the late 1960s.

Table 4. To be completed table with trends in ‘inspraak’ by period.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislation</td>
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<td>Policy thinking</td>
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<td>Planning practice</td>
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Under societal developments we discuss the existing literature about important social changes, about the position of government, and, finally, the role of planning. For the period between 1970 and 1980, for example, we first sum up the broader social context in the preamble of the 1970s and of the 1970s itself, and then continue with focusing our attention on the ‘inspraak’–relevant changes in the political and institutional order, the position of government, and the position of planning. The legislation perspective provides an impression of the most important landmarks in law and regulations. The text under the heading policy thinking features a discussion of advisory reports for every period. Here we have a look at the problem definitions that are employed and the objectives that are aimed at. The discussion of the landmarks in planning practice is founded on an exploration of various old and new research reports and specialist literature. Apart from that, we have extended the discussion here and there with impressions from our interviews with experienced planners.

3.1 1970–1980

Societal trends

The broader social context in the 1960s can be characterised by economic growth, the extension of the welfare state and the typical Dutch phenomenon of pillarisation. Society was organised in clearly separated pillars—mainly based on religion. There is a large political stability because of the role of the elite in the system of pillarisation (Lijphart, 1968). The social context in the
1970s can be characterised with the key-words economic prosperity, growing attention for the quality of life and the breakthrough of traditional relations in society by the democracy movement (WRR, 1983). In an economic respect, the beginning of the 1970s feature an economic boom. The discussion on the quality of life is stimulated by growing environmental concerns and by discussions on reforms in education. Environment and social well-being are placed against welfare. There is a breakthrough in the authoritarian structures in many institutions like universities, associations, business, and government. In addition, there is the attempt especially by social movements and actions groups to replace exiting institutions and generate innumerable social initiatives (Korsten, 1979).

Also in the US and the UK social movements such as the growing neighbourhood movement played an important role (Clavel, 1986; Richardson, 1983). Clavel (1986) even introduces the neighbourhood organisations as ‘the most dramatic political movement of the 1970s’. Richardson (1983) emphasises that the ultimate success of the rise in citizen participation was boasted by the simple fact that there were more people that were affected by government decisions. Additionally, these people became more organised in community and neighbourhood organisations.

Also the protest activities initiated in the 1960s and 1970s played an important role in other countries. For the UK, for example, Taylor (1998) points out that the opposition of ‘some groups’ in the 1960s were an indicator of the fact that the prevailing mechanisms of representative democracy were not working very well. He describes the development that planning had become a political process and the subsequent call for the public to become actively involved as an explanation for the emergence of public participation. According to Richardson (1983), citizens became more demanding as they were much less willing than before to trust authority. Partly because of rising education levels, people began to feel more able to participate actively and assert their own views. In addition, according to Richardson (1983), people had higher expectations of government services. The public generally became more demanding about the output and effectiveness of public decision making.

In the Netherlands, the stability in political relations was broken by a greater competitiveness among political parties and by outer parliamentary actions that cause political parties to act more actively. There was a great interest in party renewal especially in the left parties. Additionally, people were searching for renewal in the political constitution, such as the direct elections of mayors, through which the gap between citizens and politics (Daaldert, 1974) should be reduced. ‘Inspraak’ as a particular form of participation was seen as one of the solutions for the crisis in representative democracy. The existing legislation was not tempered with.

There is an evident concern in this period that ‘inspraak’ as an instrument could have adverse consequences for the democratic functioning of government. Notes of warning were struck that a more informal approach – ‘inspraak’ was considered to be informal at that time – would not connect adequately with administrative decision making. The solution for this problem was sought in regarding ‘inspraak’ as a supplement to the existing procedures and not as a replacement.

In the 1960s, public administration questions were barely related to questions about the general position of government in society. Dutch government took its responsibility for the economy by creating all kind of new forms of public-private partnerships such as the Social-Economic Board and in the implementation of the Dutch system of social security. In contrast to the 1960s, in the 1970s the working of government is widely discussed. Both political parties and administrative departments are under pressure. Both institutions are supposed to be insensitive for the demands from society. This leads to criticism on the political constitution and to proposals for constitutional changes (Commission Cals Donner, 1968-1971).

In the beginning of the 1960s, planning was still defined as a scientific policy tool, which could operate relatively independently from political and social relations (Van Gunsteren, 1976). In planning literature and practice, however, there was a growing understanding that
planning could not only be based on scientific rationality but also on political considerations (Quene, 1982). Government planning in the Netherlands became to be long-term comprehensive planning aiming at reform and renewal in society (Van Houten, 1974). Planning was modelled increasingly in mutual interaction with societal developments (WRR, 1983).

Landmarks in legislation

‘Inspraak’ was a new phenomenon in the 1960s. In the decades after it was legally institutionalised. From a strict legal perspective, ‘inspraak’ in the 1960s was a matter of the originisation of the Spatial Planning Act (WRO) and, in the 1970s, the so-called National Key Planning Decisions (PKB), and the introduction of the environmental impact assessment. In all these pieces of legislation, ‘inspraak’ is usually presented as an instrument that can offer solutions for the problems with the democratic involvement of citizens.

An essential element in the US context for public participation is the concept or private property. The participation emphasis in the US during the 1970s challenged the place in liberal values of property rights and market decision making (Clavel, 1986). In the term of liberal democracy, participation has an economic position, through the ownership of property. Crudely put: participation equals property. This makes for an interesting comparison with the Dutch prominence of the actio popularis’, which is not based on property or interest, but, rather, on involvement of (lay) knowledge and ideas of the participating public. The ‘actio popularis’ plays an essential role in the history of Dutch public participation legislation.

The Dutch Housing Act from 1901 already allowed parties to officially oppose housing plans. They had to have a clear related interest, however. Until the 1950s, only landowners could participate in decision-making processes. They did so by written objections and appeals (De Gier et al, 1999). Since the early 1950s also other owners and tenants were accepted as interested parties. Furthermore, the belief grew in the course of the 1950s that the substance of the objections should be decisive, and not the position of the participant. It was thought that a planning process that was open to everyone to file objections would be more beneficial for the quality of the plan. The thought that participants can bring up relevant information and thus help planners with their inquiries is a persistent one. Commissie Duk (1973) put this as follows: “Full justice is done to public participation [‘inspraak’] when those who want to object do not encounter from the very start a legal regulation which makes demands upon the capacity in which these people set themselves up as being interested.”

An indirect ‘actio popularis’ was introduced in the Spatial Planning Act (WRO) of 1962. It means that everyone can appeal against a local plan, provided that one has already reacted to the draft version of the plan at an earlier stage in the decision-making process. Up till today, everyone in the Netherlands can appeal against important plans such as a key planning decision, a regional plan, and a structure plan. For these plans it is not necessary to have reacted at an earlier stage or have a clear interest or property at stake.

The WRO from 1965 was an important impulse for ‘inspraak’ because it offered the opportunity to protest against local and regional plans with written objections. ‘Inspraak’ was organised to canalise these protests (Van der Cammen & De Klerk, 1986). The WRO also ‘broadened’ the involvement of other actors in planning procedures. According to one of the interviewees, for instance, the development of the WRO caused the national department for public works (‘rikswaterstaat’), to see a more clear relation between transportation planning and spatial planning. A part of this implied the involvement of other administrative bodies. The broadening was new because in the past ‘rikswaterstaat’ would rely on the so-called River Act, which, according to the department, would precede the new WRO. The procedures for transportation projects only consisted of laying plans on the table and administrative consultation. Now, the involvement of citizens became more or less indirect, by allowing objections against transportation routes in the regional plan (‘streekplan’), and, eventually, in the binding local land-use plan (‘bestemmingsplan’).

The interviews further revealed that municipalities and provinces are perceived as
forerunners in regulating procedures about ‘inspraak’. Dutch law stresses in this period ‘inspraak’ as a means to democratise decision-making (Vucsán, 1995). This meant, as for instance indicated by the advisory commission Duk (1974), that a right on ‘inspraak’ had to be granted to everybody. People who participate, the so-called ‘insprekers’, are not obliged to declare their particular interest in one way or another in order to be allowed to participate.

During the 1970s, the basis was laid in the Netherlands for the discussion on decision making about large (infrastructure) projects (WRR, 1994). An important proposal was the so-called operational area appointment (OGA), which contained a parallel run of procedures for different aspects and interests in the use of land. The proposal also aimed at better administrative consultation. Another important development was the introduction of the environmental impact assessment. The changing attitude towards the environment in the 1970s meant that, eventually, for nearly all large infrastructure plans environmental impact assessments had to be carried through (Van Altena et al, 1990).

Also, in this period, the main lines of national spatial policy became a subject for ‘inspraak’. The public participation arrangements according to the national Key Planning Decisions (PKB) aimed mostly on consultation with formal bodies such as the Advisory Committee on Spatial Planning (RARO). The various structure schemes such as the structure scheme for transport find their basis in the PKB regulation. The PKB instrument deals with national policies for spatial planning and its adjacent sectors. Our interviews revealed that the introduction of the system of PKBs is perceived as crucial for the position of ‘inspraak’ in the course of the 1970s. The PKB laid stress on matters of national spatial planning.‘Inspraak’ simply joined in.

Landmarks in policy thinking
The problem definition used in policy documents and advisory reports of the period between 1970 and 1980 highlight the position of the citizen. The report ‘Advice on ‘inspraak’ for Decisions for National Land Use’ (RARO 1970), for example, observes that many citizens feel that they are confronted with established facts and that citizens are involved in making too late. The advisory report ‘Involving Citizens in National Policy Making regarding Spatial Planning’ (RARO, 1970a) poses the question what the possibilities would be to involve citizens more strongly in spatial planning on different levels of government. The Biesheuvel Advisory Committee (1970) utilised the same question for government information: “to what extent and in which way can and should information that is in hands of the government be accessible for citizens?” It can be deduced from these problem definitions that the major problems dealt with the insufficient involvement of citizens in the realisation of public policy. This problem was reflected by situations in which citizens felt that they were confronted with ‘established facts’.

The normative assumptions, the statements about the goals of ‘inspraak’, between 1970 and 1980, are aimed at enlarging the influence of inhabitants of an area (RARO 1970a) and on the desirability to enlarge the openness of policy making (Commissie Biesheuvel, 1970). An important tension observed by the RARO (19790a) includes the tension between direct democracy and the weight of political representation. On the one hand, there are the democratic demands that citizens should gain more influence in the direction in which public policy develops. On the other hand, policy documents reflect the concern that direct democracy should not harm the significance of representative democracy. Both the RARO and the Biesheuvel Committee take the position that a possible prolongation of decision-making procedures through the introduction of participation should not offset the importance of a public debate on the policy issue.

Overall, in the period 1970–1980, ‘inspraak’ is considered to be an instrument to achieve certain goals. The normative stances are based on two different thoughts. In policy thinking of the RARO, ‘inspraak’ and its legislation are a means to prevent that citizens are confronted with ‘established facts’ and to improve the working of democracy (RARO 1970, RARO 1970a). The thinking of the Biesheuvel Advisory Committee regards ‘inspraak’, its legislation
and early discussions on intended public policy as means to enlarge the direct influence of citizens and—by enlarging this influence—improve the openness of government policy making. The official government position on ‘inspraak’ combines both views. ‘Inspraak’ becomes ‘everyone’s inspraak’, and is seen as a means through which the involvement of citizens—in exchanging views and information—can be enlarged.

Taylor (1998) shows the fact that governmental advisory reports can indeed be major landmarks for public participation. In the UK, the idea that the public should participate was first raised in 1965 by a report of the so-called ‘Planning Advisory Group’. Participation was seen as part of local planning processes. A major landmark came a few years later with the 1969 ‘Skeffington Report’. This report aimed to consider the best methods of securing the participation of the public at the formative stage in the making of developments plans. The report emphasised that public participation should be more than just ‘talking’. Participation was meant for the public to actively take part in plan making. The report suggested a few methods for this. Nevertheless, the ‘Skeffington Report’ still insisted that the local planning authorities, advised by professional planners, would have to keep the ultimate responsibility to prepare and take decisions. In this sense, participation was seen as involving more consultation with the public rather than an active participation in decision making. Similarly to the Netherlands, 1970s public participation in the UK was positioned as a part of the existing framework of representative democracy.

Landmarks in planning practice
Since the end of the 1960s, the attention for public participation in the Netherlands has grown. This happened not only generally, but also within the fields of planning (Randeraad & Wolffram, 1998; Van der Cammen & De Klerk, 1986). From that moment, more and more issues were discussed beyond the conventional political arenas. This occurred, for example, in the establishment of chemical industry in “Moerdijk”, and in the plans to reclaim land in the “Markerwaard” area.

In discussing these landmarks, we follow the literature as it provides an indication of the projects and incidents that may be exemplary. Castenmiller & Dekker (1989), among others, mention the protests against the use of nuclear power and the actions of environmental groups as important landmarks. Van der Cammen & De Klerk (1986) especially refer to urban renewal plans and the planning in connection to national spatial planning documents such as the “Oriënteringsnota” and the “Verstedelijkingsnota”. The RARO (1978) identified the developments in Dutch regional planning and the public participation based PKB-procedure (procedure for national Key Planning Decisions) as new for the 1970s. This period appears to have many landmarks in planning practice. Below we will discuss some of these important ones. They include urban renewal, regional planning, and the PKB.

During the 1970s, the local administrative level was known for its great diversity of public participation forms (RARO, 1978). Van der Cammen & De Klerk (1986) mainly discuss a number of incidents with urban renewal in the Netherlands that took place in the beginning of the 1970s. Grass roots citizen groups emerged and demanded say in planning processes and the implementation of plans. The protests against the urban renewal plans were a signal for a lack of communal support. Urban renewal in fact became an indicator for social developments but acted also as a catalyst for latter public participation initiatives itself. Also in Germany, urban construction and renewal led to more formalised forms of citizen participation since the end of the 1960s (Landsberger, 1980).

On the municipal level, democratization by ‘inspraak’ was both the objective in itself and it was an instrument to gain public support. Representative democracy was the first matter of importance. Predominantly, municipal ‘inspraak’ was a means to facilitate the acceptance of plans or decisions. Govers & Mast (1978) show that during the 1970s local authorities still interpreted public participation very instrumental: it was seen as a technique for consultation. Possibly also because of this, local public participation did not become a big hit. In Amsterdam
for example, the development of plans for urban renewal did not arouse the interest of many citizens (Beck en Mendel, 1983). All our interviewees point out that local public participation served more as a 'trigger' for the development of public participation than regional and national experiences. The roots of 'inspraak' thus lie in the grass roots groups that tried to influence local demolition programs around 1965.

The regional planning activities of Dutch provinces are in its entirety also an important landmark in the development of public participation. Although there was much variation, from 1970 onward almost every regional planning procedure contained a public participation procedure and an objection procedure. The Regional Plan for Midden-Gelderland (a region near the city of Arnhem) was a well-known example (Korsten, 1979). Common in all provinces was a shift from institutionalised participation (in the so-called Regional Commissions) toward more informal 'discussion groups'. A review by the RARO (1978) concluded that the informal methods of public participation did not combine sufficiently with administrative and political decision making. A characterisation of the former can be found in several regional planning processes in the 1970s (for example Midden-Gelderland, Centraal-Groningen, Drenthe, Midden- en Oost-Brabant, Amsterdam-Noordzekaanaalgebied, Rijnmond). The organisational separation of informal participation and the common administrative and political decision-making processes caused the actual influence of public participation on the content of the policies to be insignificant (e.g., Goverde & Mast, 1979). Korsten (1979) for a matter of fact, emphasised that the public participation at the provincial level led to more growth in the trust through support and consent after the decision was made.

The Key Planning Decision (PKB) was introduced in a government paper published in 1972 (Korsten, 1979). The paper reacted on the demand for more 'inspraak' and more publicity about important plans and decisions at the national level. The PKB was more of an indicator for social and governmental developments – such as the regional planning activities and the local experiments with public participation – than a catalyst. Randeraad & Wolffram (1998) associate the protests against the establishment of a chemical plant at “Moerdijk” and near Amsterdam with the development of the PKB-procedure. In that sense, these projects served as catalysts for the development of public participation. The PKB-procedure was among other things a way to ensure 'inspraak' about the main lines of national spatial policy. Public participation referred to deliberation in formal advisory agencies like the Council for Spatial Planning Advice (RARO).

Former research indicates that the results of PKB based public participation procedures like the 'Orien teringsnota' and the 'Verstedelijkingsnota' had a reasonable amount of influence on the final decisions (Jolles et al, 1977). The PKB procedures, however, could take a lot of time. According to Randeraad & Wolffram (1998), this moderate effect was not as much caused by the 'inspraak' procedures, but sooner by the reserved way in which policy targets were formulated. The long duration of the PKB procedure about the possible construction of the Markerwaard polder (between 1974 and 1990), was mainly caused by the postponement of the final decision for financial reasons (Wolffram, 1997). For that matter, it became clear that with this form of public participation only a limited group of citizens was reached. Selective participation was seen, however, as a practical rather than a principal problem.

In general, our interviewees perceive 'inspraak' during the 1970s as a means to create support for public policy initiatives within the existing administrative organisation. Public participation as a means for more democracy was predominantly expressed at the local level. Furthermore, our interviewees state that the causality between landmarks and the development of public participation is extremely complex. Amelisweerd, for example, was not the only cause for different ideas about participation within the Dutch planning system. The 1970s can be characterised as a period of big ambitions and a very elaborated program of planning projects. According to some of our interviewees, however, most planning projects must be understood as indicators for public participation on a societal level.

Overall, for the period between 1970 and 1980, a strong emphasis stands out on normative
standpoints about democracy, as well as standpoints which position ‘inspraak’ as an instrument to involve the public or the citizen closer in policy making. We typify this impression of the 1970s under the denominator ‘inspraak as a solution’.

3.2 1980–1990

Societal developments
The social context in this period can be characterised by the change in economic development, which is generally perceived as an economical crisis accompanied by a strong growth of unemployment. A typical development for the social context around 1980, according to the WRR (1983), includes the emergence of so-called autonomous behaviour. Autonomous behaviour emerges in tax evasion, fraud with social security benefits but also in a growing radicalism of grass roots groups like squatters. Also the new class of professional and certain groups of the civil service were blamed to act too much on their won authority. The political arena is characterised by the emergence of economic neo-conservatism as a broad political school, with pleas for more trust in the market mechanism, privatisation of government task and deregulation (Ten Heuvelhof, 1984).

Criticism on the functioning of government follows from the criticism on the welfare state. This criticism is not based on democratic ideologies and ideals, but, rather, on the failure of administrative systems and structures. Public participation has become an institutionalised part of the criticised government. The big social conflicts in this period include issues such as the placement of nuclear cruise missiles and house squatting.

The discussion about the functioning of government centres on the chaotic and inefficient way in which government works and the growing number of rules and legislation that seem to have no impact on governmental control (Commissie Hoofdstructuur Rijkdienst, 1980). Furthermore, the strong growth of departments was subjected to heavy criticism (Ringeling, 1978). The reorganisation of central government was perceived as a solution for the problems.

Around 1980, planning is perceived as the construction of administrative structures aimed at the co-ordination of administration (Commissie Hoofdstructuur Rijkdienst, 1983). This conception of planning fits with a growing independence of society, the break down of future expectations caused by economic stagnation and an uncertain international environment.

Landmarks in legislation
At the beginning of the 1980s, the attention for the procedural side of spatial planning grew (Voogd, 1996). This period shows a continuous increase in legislation, with a strong emphasis on the legislation of public participation procedures and co-ordination of decision making. The main focus was on standardising and thereby reducing the diversity of legislation. The 1980s were the period of the modification of the Spatial Planning Act (WRO) in 1985, the General Environmental Law (WABM), and all sorts of sectoral regulating. The content and the type of legislation show an ongoing pattern of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation. New, for instance, were entrance rules for some public participation procedures. The WABM (1979) stated that everyone was entitled to have a say on a license application but ‘inspraak’ about the draft decision was only possible for those who participated in the phase of license application (Vucsan, 1995).

At the end of the 1970s, public participation became more and more institutionalised. From our interviews there is evidence that institutions such as the so-called ‘Central Inspraak Unit’ (CPI) wanted to ‘lay everything down in established rules’. Some of our interviewees conclude that legally organised ‘inspraak’ canalised the diversity of experiences from participants too much. This would be contradictory with social developments. The early experiences with public participation are therefore evaluated more positively than the experiences in the 1980s. It seems that in the 1970s public participation was still full of life and not bureaucratised, as is
the case with public participation in the 1980s, according to some of our interviewees. Public servants took controlling positions. In addition, the institutionalisation of interest groups was essential.

Another important change in the 1980s was the modification of the WRO in 1985. This modification aimed at accelerating spatial decision-making processes. Important changes involved strict procedural terms for the procedures within local land-use planning, the creation of the possibility of direct influence of the central government on local decisions (which is a controversial administrative figure in the Dutch political system), the augmentation of the ground for direct involvement of the national government in local planning, and the introduction of the so-called ‘invitation competence’ as an extra intervention instrument for the central government (WRR, 1994). To ensure public participation in an early stage of the planning process, a new provision was introduced in the WRO. According to this provision, public participation was obliged in procedures concerning local land-use plans and local structure plans (Van Buuren et al., 1999).

In short, legislation in the 1980s shows an ongoing institutionalisation of public participation and a beginning of a process of centralisation of specific elements in spatial planning procedures.

Landmarks in policy thinking
In the period between 1980 and 1990, the focus of the problem definitions partially shifts from the citizen to the way in which public participation should be legally organised. This focus is associated with questions about the policy implications of experiences with public participation (RARIO, 1978), the cost (not any longer the benefits) and efficiency of public participation procedures, and the desirability of more legislation (RARIO, 1982). The views about citizen participation in governmental policy making were changing (Koningh et al., 1985). It was not any longer common to only state that citizens are involved in decision making too late. New is the observation that it was not only the fault of government that citizen participation was positioned too late in procedures. Also the citizens themselves came into action in a late stage of procedures. Additionally, in this period, attention was given to the problem of the long-windedness of planning procedures.

Normative elements (the objectives employed) about ‘inspraak’ in the early 1980s generally show continuity in the thinking about public participation. No new objectives of public participation are mentioned. Also no new arguments for existing targets are developed. This continuity appears also from the RARIO advice to continue with PKB related public participation and to develop partial legal legislation for ‘inspraak’ procedures (RARIO, 1978). At the same time, there are some minor shifts at the procedural side. For instance, the RARIO advises to develop tighter public participation procedures. These procedures were to provide more clarity on the responsibility for public participation, on planning in stages, and on the accounting of public participation procedures.

In public participation in the 1980s, the emphasis lies on legal legislation as a means to give public participation a permanent place in the plan-making processes (RARIO, 1978). No new means of public participation are mentioned.

Landmarks in planning practice
Until the start of the 1980s, public participation was generally seen as an instrument to improve decision making. In particular, policy makers had a very instrumental view on public participation. Within this picture, there was much attention for the institutionalisation of the day to day implementation practice. It is striking that this period offers very little landmarks for the practice of public participation. Most of the attention for public participation is shifted towards the development of legal rules for ‘inspraak’. Nevertheless, there are some eye-catching examples.

Landmarks within the field of infrastructure planning are the water management plans in
the Eastern Scheldt ('Oosterscheldewerken') and the efforts to construct a highway in the 'Amelisweerd' nature area (Bosch et al., 1998). Bruning (1994) concludes that the policy makers concerned with the Eastern Scheldt project had failed to anticipate changing perceptions in society. Huberts (1992) believes that Amelisweerd is a particularly good example of this miscalculation of authorities. Amelisweerd refers to the protests of action groups from 1971 onward against the construction of a highway through the estate of Amelisweerd near the city of Utrecht. The highway could only be built after 1982, when the police terminated an occupation by grass roots groups of the estate (Grimbergen, et al., 1983). The project Amelisweerd shows that the demand for policy change can cause others to oppose government plans. Amelisweerd was predominantly a catalyst for more public participation.

The most well known example from this period may well be the so-called Broad Societal Discussion (BMD) on nuclear energy, which focused on the placement of three nuclear facilities in the Netherlands. The BMD was preceded by a public discussion on the general energy policy at the beginning of the 1980s. Boomsma et al (1996) point out that these public discussions failed because the participants wanted to deliberate about the energy policy in general and the desirability of nuclear power in particular, and not about implementation questions. The project became a catalyst, in the sense that the failure of public participation expressed itself also in protest against the nuclear power stations of "Kalkar", "Dowardeaard" and "Borsele". Furthermore, the project is an indicator for the emancipation of environmental interests in Dutch political decision making. In the BMD project, the participation of citizens was comparatively high, but the participants were not very representative. Representativeness appears as a repetitive problem of public participation.

The developments in the period between 1980 and 1990 are dominated by the question whether and how 'inspraak' has to be couched in a particular legislative form. We characterise this notion under the headline 'inspraak as an institution'.

3.3 1990–2000

Societal developments
Typical developments in the general social context include the economic growth in the 1990s, the increasing levels of individualisation, the high tempo and the higher levels of decision making (in Europe), globalization and technological change, notably the emergence of ICT. Changes in the political context are the so-called 'purple cabinets' in the 1990s—in which Dutch liberals, conservatives, and social-democrats are a coalition government—and especially the success of the 'poldermodel' as a new way of co-operation amongst social parties. On the one hand, the movement of political parties to the center of the political spectrum and the co-operation between left and right wing parties diminished the possibility of citizens to make clear voting choices and to influence the forming of cabinets. On the other hand, democracy movement reached her aims. Whenever there are specific citizens interest at stake there are—in this period—all kinds of formalised participation possibilities aimed at solving societal problems and bringing citizen and government together (Thomassen, 2000).

In planning activities, more and more interest and content aspects are accounted for because of an increase in the complexity and the scale of spatial issues (RPD, 2000). In addition, the position of government in society changed. Notably, the administrative culture became more business-wise and detached. Also the relation between governments and citizens changed. Conflicts of interest are stated more explicit and reach court more often. WRR (1998) points to the doubts of government and citizens about the value of 'inspraak', maybe because of opposite expectations. 'Inspraak' is seen as a problem. Government claims that public participation procedure often cause needless delays in decision making processes, notably in the early stages of policy making, when the 'need and purpose' of large projects is discussed.
Often, public participation does not lead to prevention of conflicts of interest, but to intensification. On the contrary, civil or social organisations point to the democratic deficits of different procedures. Due to its complexity, professional administrators can conceal themselves in the procedures in such a way that these organisations cannot offer any counterbalance. Instead of an opportunity for co-operation, citizens who want to participate are confronted with ‘accomplished facts’.

*Landmarks in legislation*

The period between 1990 and 2000 gave ‘inspraak’ a new face with the coming into effect of the General Administrative Law (Awb), the revised Provincial Act and the revised Municipal Act, the new Road and Rail Route Act (Tracéwet), the Nimby legislation and the discussions about the legal procedures for major projects. Van der Cammen and De Klerk (1986) observe growing criticism on the level of detail, inflexibility and difficulty of procedures that legislation brought about. In practice, numerous, substantively different ‘inspraak’ procedures were in force (Burkens et al., 1994). Public participation procedures became a problem in itself. Changes in spatial planning regulations were aimed at better co-ordination, more efficient decision making and standardisation of procedures (WRR, 1994).

According to the WRR (1994), the General Administrative Law from 1994 was a response to the fragmentation and differentiation of administrative provisions. It was the result of the ambition, in the 1980s, to harmonise the general rules of administrative law. In the 1990s, the Provincial and Municipal Law were revised too. The Provincial Act in particular arranged well the participation by administrative institutions. (Van den Heuvel, 1999). The revised Municipal Act demanded that municipal councils issue a local bye-law with statements about the way in which citizens and other interested parties could participate in municipal policy making.

The legislation par excellence for 1990s are the Road and Rail Route Act (‘Tracéwet’) and the Nimby provision in the WRO. These changes caused clearer competence of higher administrative levels to protect national interests. The Road and Rail Route Act (1994) is an act in which the co-ordination between infrastructure and spatial planning is regulated explicitly. In short, the Road and Rail Route Act regulated the routing procedure and the co-ordination of decision making in the sectoral and the spatial tracks. The Environmental Impact Assessment provision and all spatial considerations are integrated into one procedure, which also includes public participation. With reference to the Road and Rail Route Act and the Nimby provision, the WRR (1998) points at the growth in the 1990s on infrastructure facilities. This emphasis caused public participation to shift to upper local levels. As a result, the main role of the local land-use plan and the associated local public participation procedures has diminished.

*Landmarks in policy thinking*

In the problem definition on public participation in this period, the focus shifts from the citizen perspective (1970s) and the regulatory perspective (1980s) to the question how the procedures concerning major projects should be structured and —possibly— be shortened (WRR 1994). In addition, policy advisory documents emphasise the assessment of new spatial plans in terms of democratic values (De Ridder, 1995), the legitimacy and effectiveness of spatial policy, and the problems concerning public participation procedures (WRR, 1998). Public participation is associated with all of these questions. In the 1970s, it was common to state that eventual delays because of public participation are less important than the democratic gains of participation. In the 1990s, more often it is written that the central problems are the long duration of decision making and the low levels of efficiency of these procedures.

Normative statements about public participation show clear target shifts. The WRR (1994), for example, points out that arrangements of decision-making processes should be directed toward as little direct resistance as possible. Therefore, public participation procedures should be changed. The need for public participation no longer stems from certain democratic values, but from public acceptance and ‘social coalition building’ (WRR, 1998).
Landmarks in planning practice

In this period, public participation was seen at in a more normative way. Public participation was a problem that raised questions about the aim and necessity of formal prescribed citizen participation. The spatial consequences of infrastructure projects became a matter of different ‘manners’. The main problem was that public participation was positioned too late in procedures. Participants could only react on detailed and already fixed proposals. Bruning (1994) and Van den Heuvel & De Vries (1999) mention the decision making process about Schiphol Airport in the beginning of the 1990s as an example of a procedure were the policy makers—partly because of political-administrative reasons—do not want to revise the content of the plan. Kusiak (1991) refers to public participation as ‘after care therapy’, ‘just a matter of form’ and a ‘mere eyewash’.

Also, the wide variety of experiments with participatory decision making, and communicative planning, pushed the attention to ‘inspraak’ aside. The new types of public involvement focused on different forms of citizen participation and co-operation with interest groups. In general, the experiments involved more pro-active forms of participation and co-operation (WRR, 1998; Veldboer, 1996; Woltjer, 2000). Important landmarks were the regional area-oriented approaches such as the one in the ‘Gelderse Vallei’ area, the regional implementation of transportation projects with the so-called ‘Infralab’-method, and the so-called ‘need and purpose debates’ for infrastructure projects at the national level. Other remarkable initiatives included the open plan processes of the North-Holland office of the Ministry of Transport. Formal public participation procedures were complemented with frequent deliberations between the parties involved.

The fact that new types of public involvement ultimately are supplements sooner than substitutes of the existing ‘inspraak’ procedures, implies that ‘inspraak’ remained standing. Although in policy thinking ‘inspraak’ may have been regarded as a problem in itself, planning practice showed otherwise. Through the 1990s—after numerous experiments with applying communicative planning—new types of public involvement appear to not apply in any situation (Woltjer, 2000). It is important to recognise the fact that most ‘mainstream’ projects remained to successfully use formally prescribed ‘inspraak’. ‘Inspraak’ was professionalised in institutions such as the Participation Co-ordination Unit of the Ministry of Transport and Public Works. Furthermore, the ‘inspraak’ instrument received somewhat more attention at the end of the 1990s. It did, however, obtain a more ‘active’ denotation: “classical ‘inspraak’ has made way for an active participation of citizens and private parties in spatial decision making” (RPD, 2000). Societal changes and the aforementioned experiments with communicative planning have only pushed aside the conventional ‘inspraak’. Conventional ‘inspraak’, then, refers to the views from the 1970s and some regulations from the 1980s rather than the current position of ‘inspraak’ as a legally founded instrument. The meaning of ‘inspraak’ itself, therefore, has changed.

The emphasis for the entire period after 1990 lays on the undesirable side effects of ‘inspraak’ and on a reconsideration of the position of ‘inspraak’ in relation to new types of public involvement. We characterise this period with the description ‘inspraak reconsidered’.

4. A further arrangement by period

This section makes a new cross section in time. In doing this, we do not discuss the most important landmarks per period, but, rather, describe the perspectives through time. Developments within thinking about the functions of ‘inspraak’ as a Dutch type of public participation, are determined by changes in the societal context, changes in the legal design, changes in policy thinking, and changes in planning practice. The following paragraphs will
discuss these four viewpoints consecutively. Ultimately, the viewpoints will converge in a summarising table and will be discussed coherently.

The influence of societal developments on the evolution of ‘inspraak’ has been considerable. We will discuss the general social context, the position of government, and the societal position of spatial and infrastructure planning. The developments in the general social context show relatively autonomous factors such as fluctuations in the economic climate, technological innovations, population growth, developments in the mass media, in addition to related aspects such as political participation and political trust. Overall, major factors in the development of ‘inspraak’ have included: a break with traditional social structures, a rise in prosperity and attention to immaterial matters, a rise in education levels, and an increase in available time by citizens for political activities. Another important factor is the development of the mass media. More recently, we also see a loss of trust in science and politics, and an increase in controversies and lack of unambiguous objectives within spatial planning.

Since the 1970s, the position of government within society has been continuously called into question. In the 1970s, government was criticised for the way in which it met the wishes of its citizens. The 1980s showed fundamental criticisms with regard to the magnitude and the responsibilities of government agencies themselves. Subsequently, in the 1990s, the conflicts of interest between government and private parties grew to be more explicit. The most important political development no doubt refers to the disappearance of the traditional compartmentalisation along socio-political lines (‘pillarisation’), and the break-through of actual authoritarian structures. Additionally, many proposals about constitutional renewal related to topics such as the public nature of decision-making processes, direct democracy, and referenda, had a considerable impact on discussions about ‘inspraak’.

The status of spatial and infrastructure planning within society evolved from a non-political phenomenon which—in the 1960s—was virtually unattached to social relations, to a phenomenon in which an increasing collection of interests and substantive aspects is included. The importance of social parties has increased. Throughout, planning has been shaped in an interaction with developments in society (WRR, 1983). The position destined for the role of citizens in the planning process changed accordingly. In the 1970s, planning was full of pretensions towards social renewal in which the citizen played a key role. The 1980s featured discussions about the usefulness of planning as a helpful co-ordination instrument for government. The 1990s show new types of participation and collaboration within planning processes. These new approaches stem from discontent with the existing possibilities embedded in formal public participation.

The developments within the formal legislation of Dutch public participation show a gradual institutionalisation, as a reaction to all kinds of societal developments. The public demand for democratisation in the first period (1970–1980) did not transform itself into modified procedures. The institutionalisation in legislation is preceded by experiments with the public having say. Only later, when ‘inspraak’ became established, diverse legislation contain excerpts about ‘inspraak’. The legislation from the 1960s and 1970s especially, emphasises ‘inspraak’ as an instrument to democratise public decision making. Among other thing, it meant that the right to participate in participation was to be awarded to anyone. Participants do not have an obligation to prove their ‘stake’ in order to being able to participate. Legislative proposals from the period 1980–1990 show a further institutionalisation and official establishment. During the 1980s and 1990s, legal changes about spatial-administrative decision making were mainly aimed at better co-ordination, efficient decision making, and standardisation of procedures.

An unambiguous type of policy thinking about ‘inspraak’ has not been found. The reports of advisory bodies (e.g. “RADO” and “WRR”), ad hoc committees (e.g. “Commissie Biesheuvel”), and other government documents have advanced particular considerations about the objectives of ‘inspraak’. These considerations have failed to show an internally consistent type of policy thinking. However, differences in attitudes towards public participation clearly
emerge when the emphasis is laid on the dynamics in the three elements of policy thinking: problem definitions, normative statements, and final statements.

The problem definitions show a shift from the attention to the question how citizens should be involved in government policy (1970–1980), to the question whether and how ‘inspraak’ has to be legally regulated (1980–1990), and to the question how spatial planning procedures have to be structured in view of the legitimacy and effectiveness of these procedures (1990–2000). After 1980, the problem definitions no longer mention ‘the citizen’. The period after 1990 shows a decrease in the attention to ‘inspraak’. Furthermore, the normative statements about ‘inspraak’ have been subject to changes. Arguably, the most important change is that after 1990 the desirability of ‘inspraak’ was no longer seen as emanating from democracy demands. Rather, public participation was thought to constitute a function of ‘social coalition building’ within plan-making processes. The conclusion, then, is that the foundations for policy thinking about ‘inspraak’ have been laid in the period between 1970 and 1980. This part of policy thinking about public participation in the Netherlands has not been supplemented or changed in subsequent periods.

Planning practice displays a wide variety in landmarks in ‘inspraak’. The 1970s distinguish themselves by a multitude of plans and projects that pay attention to ‘inspraak’. The most prominent examples from the 1970s include urban renewal, regional planning, and—somewhat later—the national key planning decisions. The origins of ‘inspraak’ as we know it today principally stem from municipal urban renewal. ‘Inspraak’ of the 1970s mainly was a democratisation instrument, which was to be used within actual legislation and regulations. The 1980s showed fewer practical landmarks for ‘inspraak’. There were a few interesting ones, however: the Eastern Scheldt Water Management Plans, the highway through “Amelisweerd”— which originated from the 1970s—, and the Broad Societal Discussion on nuclear energy. Reflections about ‘inspraak’ as an instrument to democratise policy making and furthermore improve policy making concerning the content, were extended with concerns about the efficiency of the ‘inspraak’ instrument. Finally, the 1990s featured many experiments with communicative planning. These experiments operated supplementary to the continuation of actual institutionalised legally prescribed ‘inspraak’ in plans and projects.

Overall, we have distinguished three time periods. The period 1970–1980 characterises itself by a strong emphasis on ‘inspraak’ as a means to involve the public in policy making. Between 1980 and 1990 ‘inspraak’ is dominated by the question if and how it could be moulded into legislation. After 1990, the emphasis moves to the negative side effects of ‘inspraak’. If we would have to condense the evolution of Dutch ‘inspraak’ in one sentence, then we would characterise this evolution in terms of a shift from the emphasis on ‘inspraak as a solution’ (1970s), to ‘inspraak as an institution’ (1980s), and more recently to ‘inspraak reconsidered’ (1990s). In the final section of this paper, we compile this development in one table and draw some conclusions on the basis of this table. Ultimately, we will reflect briefly on the current position of ‘inspraak’ and its future.

5. Concluding remarks

If we look back over the past few decades, using the societal, legal, policy thinking, and practical viewpoints in mutual coherence, an overview as given in Table Five remains. The table summarises the foremost trends in the evolution of ‘inspraak’ within Dutch planning.
Table 5. Trends in Dutch ‘inspraak’ by period.

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<tr>
<td>Societal developments</td>
<td>‘inspraak’ as a solution</td>
<td>‘inspraak’ as an institute</td>
<td>‘inspraak’ reconsidered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- democratisation</td>
<td>- establishment, institutionalisation</td>
<td>- dissatisfaction with formal ‘inspraak’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- role of the citizen in the planning process</td>
<td>- planning as an instrument for co-ordination</td>
<td>- new types of public involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal changes</td>
<td>- ‘inspraak’ as a means for democratisation</td>
<td>- ‘inspraak’ in procedures and rules</td>
<td>- standardisation of procedures</td>
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<td>- ‘inspraak’ as an instrument for efficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>- objective: democracy</td>
<td>- objective: democracy</td>
<td>- objective: coalition building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changes in planning practice</td>
<td>- ‘inspraak’ as indirect participation in cities and regions</td>
<td>- ‘inspraak’ as is also at a national level</td>
<td>- new experiments</td>
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<td>- legalised ‘inspraak’ also at a national level</td>
<td>- ‘inspraak’ as a formal instrument</td>
<td>- public acceptance as an aim in itself</td>
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<tr>
<td>- supplement to representative democracy</td>
<td>- supplement to representative democracy</td>
<td>- communicative planning as an informal replacement to ‘inspraak’</td>
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<td>- attention to effectiveness and representativeness</td>
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The paramount question of this study was: “how has the function of ‘inspraak’—as a particular form of participation—developed in time?” We can ask the question here whether the notion of ‘inspraak’ nowadays still has the same assumptions and, if not, whether this is a matter of a change in the function of ‘inspraak’ or a change in the characteristics of ‘inspraak’ itself.

In Section One we already answered the question how ‘inspraak’ can be marked out against other, related notions. We observed that although the distinction with formal advisory work and communicative planning sometimes is a smooth one, ‘inspraak’ clearly differentiates from some related concepts. A key observation is that—since the 1960s—‘inspraak’ has become established in coherence with representative democracy.

The trends as recapitulated in Table Five show remarkable parallels between ‘inspraak’ from the 1970s and the new types of public involvement in the 1990s. A striking similarity can be found in the normative arguments. For both periods the (professional) literature holds normative statements about the desirability of the participation of citizens and other societal groups. ‘Inspraak’ from the 1970s as well as communicative planning from the 1990s was not yet institutionalised legally. The discussion about the necessity mainly was a normative one. A distinctive difference between ‘inspraak’ in the 1970s and new involvement in the 1990s is the moment in which ‘inspraak’ is believed to be applicable. The 1990s were dominated by the desire for an early involvement in plan making. This desire was based on the idea that the possibilities to exert any influence would otherwise be gone. Both ‘inspraak’ and the new types of involvement—usually inspired by the ideas on communicative planning—are an answer to new societal developments. This observation brings us to the next question: “what is the influence of societal developments on the evolution of ‘inspraak’?”

Generally, we would argue that there are strong ties of societal developments to landmarks in practice. Societal developments have a rather direct repercussion on planning practice. Yet, these influences mainly concern forerunners and experiments. In addition, as both the
interviews and the explorations in practice and policy have suggested, societal developments actuate changes in the legally prescribed public participation. The social development is first. After that, institutionalisation within ‘inspraak’ processes follows. Planning practice also has a remarkable reference by itself, which emphasises ‘made-to-measure’ or contingent approaches and variation in the way in which public participation should generally be applied. To some degree, the landmarks in practice are also catalysts for changes in the other perspectives. These catalysts and the societal developments provide the opportunities and limits within which ‘inspraak’ can develop itself.

These observations raise the question of who actually initiates changes in ‘inspraak’. As for the changes in policy thinking, ‘the problem’ regarding ‘inspraak’ is defined from a government standpoint. Initially, this problem entailed the involvement of citizens. Subsequently, the problem definitions moved to the legal arrangement of ‘inspraak’. Eventually, ‘inspraak’ itself became to be the problem, stemming from concerns about the legitimacy and effectiveness of procedures. In a way, this problem reflects a societal quest for a balance between representative democracy and all kinds of involvement –or, in other words, the relation between direct and indirect participation.

In elaborating on the arguments and functions of ‘inspraak’ in Section One, we distinguished between the arguments and functions for citizens and those for government. This brings us to the final question: “How did the function of ‘inspraak’ evolve in legislation, policy thinking and planning practice?” Below, we will discuss an overall picture without differentiating between the perspectives –i.e. societal developments, legal changes, policy thinking and planning practice.

The explorations in the four different perspectives have shown a remarkably consistent image about the functions of public participation in Dutch planning. There are little differences in the development of the functions of ‘inspraak’ in societal developments, legal changes, policy thinking and planning practice. For all perspectives, ‘inspraak’ is founded on a representative democracy model –with indirect participation and a hierarchically controlling government. There are some minor differences, however, as can be seen in Table Five. The most distinct thread throughout the evolution of ‘inspraak’ is the transition from discussions about ‘inspraak’ as a solution in itself, out of normative views about democratisation (1970–1980), to ‘inspraak’ as an institutionalised instrument for citizen participation (1980–1990), towards experiments and discussions about ‘inspraak’ as an archaic instrument within standards about new types of involvement (1990–2000).

The period 1970–1980 mainly reflects the normative attitude about the extent to what ‘the citizen’ should have the opportunity to participate in public decision making. Strengthening representative democracy was the first matter of importance. In this period, ‘inspraak’ was some sort of additional data flow, and it was not directed toward building direct democracy. In planning practice, citizens had normative conceptions of ‘inspraak’. Citizens were looking for opportunities to influence decision making.

The ideological ‘load’ of ‘inspraak’ between 1980 and 1990 remained to be aimed at strengthening existing representative democracy. The idea of introducing notions of direct democracy was not cherished very much. The normative arguments from the 1970s, however, gave way to more instrumental arguments. ‘Inspraak’ gradually became a legally established instrument that could fulfil desires by citizens and government.

Experiments with public involvement as an objective in itself or as a form of direct participation emerge after 1990. In the last period (1990–2000), considerations about ‘inspraak’ as a problematic phenomenon which ‘comes too late in the day’, have the upper hand. The 1990s –and to a certain extent also the end of the 1980s– feature considerable dissatisfaction with the results of some ‘inspraak’ processes. Generally, in this last period, perceptions prevail about ‘inspraak’ as a problematic phenomenon. Contrary to the 1970s, it seems that the desire for early involvement mainly stems from government. This arises from a perspective of effectiveness and gaining public support. Obviously, there also was the desire by societal
groups and citizens to be involved. This desire, however, does not come forward as strongly as it did in the 1970s.

All in all, the ‘inspraak’ initiatives that were initiated in the 1970s remained standing throughout the next decades – particularly in planning practice. On the one hand, ‘inspraak’ thus is an actual formal instrument that works well in many ‘straightforward’ situations. On the other hand, ‘inspraak’ itself gradually acquired another meaning, which does not comply in a strict sense to the demarcations as set out in Section One. The meaning of the participation conception has been subject to change through time, and, therefore, has been in itself a part of the historical development of public involvement. In the 1970s, for example, public participation was almost an ideological, normative, very broad conception. Conversely, in the 1990s, public participation is more often seen as a formal instrument.

The future of ‘inspraak’

We will finish this paper with a brief reflection on the current and future position of ‘inspraak’. First, we conclude that formally prescribed ‘inspraak’ continues to play an eminent role for a wide range of projects and plans. Second, we conclude that societal change in the 1990s and the experiments with communicative planning did not push aside the role of ‘inspraak’ as a legally founded instrument. New types of public involvement are a supplement rather than a replacement of existing ‘inspraak’ procedures. In addition we also established that at the end of the 1990s ‘inspraak’ has attracted some more attention. The ‘inspraak’ notion did receive a more ‘active’ meaning. Does this meaning signify that the boundary between ‘inspraak’ and communicative planning will fade away?

An important difference between communicative planning from the 1990s and public participation from the period 1970–1980 is that the latter originated bottom up. According to one of our interviewees, the new ways of citizen involvement, which emerged during the 1990s, sometimes were ‘unasked gifts’. An explanation for this is simply that under communicative planning the desires of government received more attention. Consequently, Richardson (1983), among others, does not just accept an explanation that participation is something that citizens themselves demand. She illustrates that the demands for public participation also stem from the ‘producers’ of policy. This played already a role in the course of the 1970s, when the dramatic growth in scale of the institutions comprised all kinds of new administrative layers that were created between ‘those who determined policies’ and ‘those for whom services were provided’. Because of this gulf between officials and citizens, government officials and politicians searched for new (participatory) ways of re-bridging the gap. Institutions simply need regular interaction with their consumers. This interaction is especially important since officials need to know what if publicly acceptable in order to advise politicians and make sensible policy. Participation is in their interest. From Richardson, we can conclude then that the desire for participation, from a government standpoint, has not changed considerably. The ability, however, to realise this desire has changed considerably. Government officials found themselves with increased responsibilities and also with increased administrative layers between themselves and the consumers of their services.

Obviously, participation approaches can meet the desires of citizens and interest groups for more involvement in plan making. Likewise, however, it also fulfils the requirements of planning institutions, which are more often based on principles of public support. Both wishes go together excellently. Furthermore, the statement about new types of public involvement sometimes being ‘unasked gifts’ seems to be somewhat contradictorily with the impression that societal developments sooner denote an increase in the desire for new types of involvement. We feel, however, that communicative planning is not an instrument that is applicable all over. We would suggest that we are dealing with a philosophy about planning, and not a universally applicable instrument. ‘Inspraak’, however, is indeed universally applicable.

Perhaps the most important difference between communicative policy making and public participation is that the latter is more reactive. In many instances where communicative
planning is utilised, participants have an opportunity to have say in the problem definition stage of the planning process. In ‘inspraak’ participants are only allowed to phrase their opinion later on – e.g. about alternatives. We are dealing here with a difference in the involvement of citizens and societal parties in the output of plan making (‘inspraak’) or an involvement in the input (communicative planning). Furthermore, literature and a majority of our interviewees mention that the functions of communicative policy making – just like public participation – are aimed toward gaining support for plans. In this sense, the boundaries between ‘inspraak’ and communicative planning have become more vague. ‘Inspraak’ as well as communicative planning are concentrated on gaining public support or public acceptance. ‘Inspraak’, however, is much more a functional instrument and communicative planning a normatively substantiated idea (see Table Four below).

Table 4. ‘Inspraak’ vs. communicative planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main orientation</th>
<th>‘inspraak’</th>
<th>Communicative planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main origination</td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>normative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from citizens</td>
<td>from government and citizens, sometimes ‘unmasked gift’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main involvement</td>
<td>output participation</td>
<td>input participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main function</td>
<td>gaining support and acceptance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Dutch attitudes about the consequences of the ‘communicative turn’ in planning for legally prescribed public participation are divided into two positions. Both positions emphasise processes of institutionalisation.

Some people think that problems arise as soon as new forms of participation and collaboration have been established legally. In this view, it is better to depart from the ‘inspraak’ instrument as soon as it is ‘channelled’ through universal rules. Public participation legislation are then perceived as a virtually archaic construction which treats public involvement procedures in terms of management and control tools and which ignores societal developments. In this view, ‘inspraak’ is best be replaced by new arenas for communicative planning.

We think, however, that formal ‘inspraak’ nowadays has to be seen as a part of a conglomerate of a variety of deliberations. In this view ‘inspraak’ should fit social needs by positioning itself as a supplement to new informal participation activities. Communicative planning and its offshoots do not substitute, but merely supplement ‘inspraak’, and must only be brought into action if particular situations. This could well be a sensible view since changes in Dutch public participation have generally been responses to social demands. Whereas in the 1970s, the mere existence of ‘inspraak’ was something special, people nowadays are emancipated in such a way that they are critical when, for example, a map turns out incorrect or when a civil servant is not able to express him/herself properly. ‘Inspraak’ processes have to harmonise with such demands. That means that ‘inspraak’ suffices as an instrument, but that complex situations may require ‘inspraak’ to be complemented with some new types of public involvement.

With this, also the question emerges what the consequences could be if communicative planning would institutionalise further. Generally, the answer may be found in such an application of communicative planning that a situation dependent approach can be followed. It is not as much the position of communicative planning within procedures or its position within democratic viewpoints which comes first, but, rather, the match with the plan, the project or the problem. For planning processes, then, ‘inspraak’ is ubiquitous, whereas communicative planning may sometimes be a welcome addition.

With regard to the question who is involved in participation, we can only say that planning practice shows a wide variety of ‘inspraak’ by administrative bodies, sometimes by citizens in general, or only by interested parties. It seems that the democratic aspect is paramount. Dutch ‘inspraak’ matches a model of representative democracy. This implies that elected politicians –
informed by professional experts and lay participants—decide and that interest groups have a fairly prominent position. Problems may arise when opinions about a transformation towards direct participation emerge. The problems have a normative nature. This is about the normative questions that emerged for ‘inspraak’ in the 1970s: the beliefs about what should be done out of a certain social philosophy. In an instrumental way, however, new ways of public involvement and the participation within legally prescribed participation do not exclude each other in any way. They can occur in varying combinations, with ‘inspraak’ as a constant and communicative planning as a variable.

Finally, we would argue that the institutional structure and history underpinning planning and decision making determine the way that public participation should be understood. We feel that the institutional procedures and formal apparatus of planning highly determine the practice of public participation. This calls for great sensitivity for context when examining matters of participation in planning.

Etzioni’s (1968) distinction between ‘interwoven consensus building’ and ‘segregated consensus building’ can be used to explain this point. Dutch ‘inspraak’ as a form of public participation clearly is interwoven in an existing institutional structure or planning system. In interwoven consensus building, people have no intention to build acceptance or support, but it is a consequence of the participation activities employed. Interwoven consensus-building activities include activities that enforce common values, within actual institutions. Segregated consensus building entails specific activities often beyond conventional regulations. These activities are deliberate and have a specific intention. The more interwoven a consensus-building process is, the less do social and political processes diverge. The advantage of current ‘inspraak’, then, is that it is closely connected to relevant political decisions. Communicative planning mainly emphasises segregated consensus-building activities. It searches for new arenas where inclusionary argumentation can take place. We feel that the danger of such segregated approaches is that they have no obligation.

In addition, we are inclined to suggest that it is wrong to say that current participation processes left their old ideological and institutional baggage behind, and are outmoded. The ideas and assumptions behind public participation are complex. We hope that our historical account shows that subtle and varied assumptions and insights support Dutch public participation. These assumptions are perhaps more varied than some planning theorists and practitioners suppose. It would also seem that the adoption of communicative planning does not really imply a revolutionary change in the practice of public involvement. We are not talking here about something completely new or a philosophy that would lead to the abandonment of conventional legally prescribed public participation. Rather, we see a gradual development in thinking.

Notes

1 This paper is based on a research project on the quality of participation processes in infrastructure planning commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. The Participation Co-ordination Unit of the Ministry registers, combines, analyses and distributes the participation reactions for different projects within the field of infrastructure planning. It has two main tasks. Firstly, to co-ordinate formal legal participation procedures. Second, to guarantee and develop the quality of the participation process in a general sense. The research project aims to contribute to this second main task.

2 The term policy thinking is usually referred to as ‘policy theory’. A policy theory is compounded of a complex of assumptions that underpin a policy (Hoogerwerf, 1984). Within these assumptions a distinction can be made between causal assumptions (cause-effect relations), final assumptions (objective-instrument relations), and normative assumptions (relations between principles and norms).
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