



Ministry of Infrastructure and the  
Environment

# Spatial Planning Calendar

75 years of  
national  
spatial policy  
in The  
Netherlands

Pivotal years

1940

1945

1950

1955

▶ POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

▶ WELFARE STATE

▶ 1953 MAJOR FLOOD DISASTER

Cabinet ministers and their party affiliation

[Secretary-General Frederiks]

Ringers  
Without party affiliation

Vos  
Labour party

In 't Veld  
Labour party

Policy documents and reports



Planning concepts

Europe

Regions

- Industrialization
- Decentralization policy

- The west area

The West of the Netherlands

Urban regions

Green space

Tools - laws

- Basic decree

- Provisional regulation

Tools - funding

Organization

RNP Wederopbouw

VC

Icons

- RNP Government Agency for the National Plan Wederopbouw Ministry of Reconstruction and Public Housing
- VC Permanent Committee
- VRO Ministry of Spatial Planning and Public Housing
- RPD National Spatial Planning Agency
- RPC National Spatial Planning Committee
- RARO Advisory Council for Spatial Planning
- DG Ruimte Directorate-General of Spatial Planning
- VROM Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment
- Ruimtelijk Planbureau Bureau for Spatial Analysis
- CDL Committee for Sustainable Development
- ICES Interministerial Committee for Investments in Economic Development
- VROM Raad Advisory Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment
- DG Ruimte en Water Directorate-General for Spatial Planning and Water Management
- I en M Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment
- PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
- CI en M Committee for Infrastructure and Environmental Policy
- RU Advisory Council for the Environment

- 1) 36 experts who met annually from 1968, initially in Rome, to discuss the environment and published a ground-breaking report in 1972 'Limits to Growth'
- 2) 'Rim City Holland'- agglomeration of the large urban regions in the west of the country
- 3) Location policy for economic activity and services according to categorization into A, B and C locations
- 4) VINEX = Supplement to the Fourth national policy document on spatial planning



Witte Catholic party | Van Aartsen Protestant party | Bogaers Catholic party | Witte Cath. | Schut Protestant party | Udink Conserv. protest. party | Gruijters Liberal democratic party



• Europort = Extension of Port of Rotterdam

and the rest of the Netherlands

• Randstad Holland²

• Northern and southern wings of the Randstad

• City region  
 • Overspill nuclei

• New towns

➤ New towns

• Buffer zones

• Spatial Planning Act

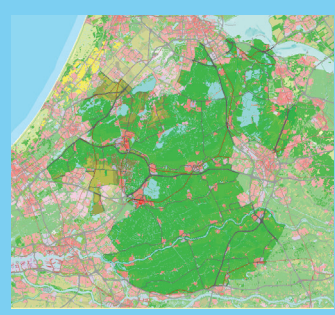
• Spatial planning key decision

• Reconstruction Act for M

• Buffer zones  
 • Urban reconstruction

RPD VRO  
 RPC RARO

**RANDSTAD HOLLAND + GREEN HEART**  
 - typical example of the distinction between town and country, initially only a general demarcation and in later decades more and more strictly defined



**STOKSTRAAT QUARTER, MAASTRICHT**  
 - pathfinder in renewal of inner cities



**MIDDEN-DELFLAND**  
 - example of buffer zone to keep open landscape between cities



**'CUBES MAP'**  
 - symbol of long term planning



1980



5 MILLIONTH DWELLING



14 MILLION INHABITANTS

1985

CUTBACKS IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING

PRIVATIZATION OF THE NATIONAL POSTAL SAVINGS BANK

Wij hebben eigenlijk maar één nationale spaarinstelling.



1990

EUROPE WITHOUT INTERNAL BORDERS

INTERNET

1995

Beelaerts van Blokland  
Christian democratic party

Van Dam  
Labour party

Nypels  
Lib. dem.

Winsemius  
Liberal party

Nijpels  
Liberal party

Alders  
Labour party

De Boer  
Labour party



- Mainports
- Continental corridors

- Regions developing on the basis of their own strengths

- Urban nodes

- ABC location policy<sup>3</sup>
- Location criteria according to the VINEX<sup>4</sup>

- Wadden Sea
- Randstad green structure

- Development strategies for rural areas

- National ecological network

- Partial review of Spatial Planning Act

- Framing act on changes in adm

Midden Delfland

Urban renewal single budget

- Supplement to the Fourth national policy document on spatial planning – VINEX implementation covenants

- Public-private partnership key development projects

- Pilot projects



DAPPER QUARTER, AMSTERDAM  
- start of urban renewal

HOUTEN NEW TOWN  
- highly praised example of a new town



EAST LIMBURG MINING AREA  
- example of regional economic reconstruction



GLOBAL GATEWAY  
- successful concept to strengthen the economy



LEIDSCHER RIJN  
- new urban district of Utrecht  
largest VINEX development



WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT MAASTRICHT  
- example of the first generation of key projects



publ

in im

2000



16 MILLION INHABITANTS

▶ 9/11

▶ MURDER OF PROMINENT POPULIST POLITICIAN PIM FORTUYN

2005



7 MILLIONTH DWELLING

▶ BANKING CRISIS

2010



2015

Pronk  
Labour party

Kamp  
Lib.  
party

Dekker  
Liberal party

Winsemius  
Liberal party

Cramer  
Labour party

Huizinga  
Evang.  
party

Schultz  
Liberal party

NOTA RUIMTE  
RUIMTE VOOR ONTWIKKELING

Deel 4: tekst na parlementaire instemming  
Ministeries van VROM, LNV, VenW en EZ



• Urban regions with economic top sectors

• Urban networks

• Randstad urban network with wings

• Northern and southern wings of the Randstad

• National landscapes

• Green space in and around the urban areas

Administrative cooperation

• Spatial Planning Act

• General rules on spatial planning decree

• Environmental Act

• Crisis and Recovery Act

• Investment projects promoting spatial quality

• Multi-annual programme for infrastructure, space and transport

• Reconstruction of business parks

• Budget for projects in the Fifth national policy document on spatial planning

DGRuimte VROM Ruimtelijk Planbureau

CDL ICES VROMraad

DGRuimte&Water I en M PBL

ClenM RLI



**WADDEN SEA**

- maintenance of balance in the largest nature area in the Netherlands



**PALACE QUARTER DEN BOSCH**

- successful public-private collaboration in renewal in the immediate vicinity of railway station



**RANDSTADRAIL** - rapid public transport in Rotterdam-The Hague metropolitan region  
innovation in regional transport

**19TH CENTURY DEFENCE LINE**

- cultural-historical importance



## Calendar

The Netherlands is a 'self-made country' and spatial planning has had a significant role in creating it. All three levels of government - municipal, provincial and national - have played their part. Municipal planning and development has always been the basis of spatial development in the Netherlands. In the 1930's the provinces followed as supra-local coordinators. Since 1941 we have had a separate institution for national spatial policy. A Spatial Planning Act has been in force since 1965 and substantive *national* policy strategies since 1966. Alongside national spatial planning, robust but interrelated systems of transport planning, environmental planning etc. have also been developed. National spatial planning as such is not strongly contested. The role of the state versus lower tiers of government, the role of spatial planning in relation to the ministries with higher budgets, and substantive themes such as housing, nature and infrastructure are all, however, subject to ongoing discussion.

This calendar highlights the history of national spatial planning over the 75 years between 1940 and 2015. Other publications give comprehensive accounts of planning in the Netherlands and should be consulted to go into more detail.

The structure of this calendar is as follows:  
First row: Pivotal years in spatial planning  
Second row: The ministers of spatial planning and their political affiliations  
Third row: Major national policy documents  
Fourth row: Spatial policy concepts  
Fifth row: Tools (legal and financial)  
Sixth row: The organizations of national planning  
Seventh row: The icons of planning.

### 1 Pivotal years

National spatial policy grew slowly from modest beginnings in 1941. Some eras are characterized by the formulation of new policies and others by policies being implemented. We identify a few pivotal years around which the course of developments changed rather quickly, for example 1940, 1970, 1990, 2000 and 2010.

In 1940 the National Frederiks Commission proposed, a few days before the Second World War broke out, to the government that a National Plan should be drawn up together with a separate Planning Act. Under German occupation what remained of the Dutch civil service founded in 1941 an Agency for the National Plan under the direction of Mr. Frederiks. At the same time regulations were put in place for provincial planning agencies, for regional plans and for the containment of development in areas of outstanding natural beauty. From 1941 onwards work continued to create modern planning legislation, to develop the organization of planning at the national level, to produce policies, and to generate public and political interest. Around the year 1970 a full-blown National Planning Agency came into existence: from 1965 a Spatial Planning Act had been in force, the agency had grown into an institution of around

100 staff plus a number of allied organizations (see section 6), and a national policy document, endorsed by parliament, had set out policies in writing and, characteristically, on maps (in 1966). A small amount of funding was reserved by the state for specific planning interests such as buffer zones, new towns and city centre redevelopment. Cultural unrest in the 1960's led to a legislative basis for public participation in national planning (1972, National Spatial Planning Key decision or PKB). The rapid expansion of the welfare state in those years led to a myriad of national policies for new infrastructure such as airports and energy networks, and for 'new' spatial interests such as recreation and nature conservation. This was done through an ever-more elaborate system of public planning procedures that were the basis for long drawn-out societal and political conflicts. Planning became in the public perception a process of following the right procedures instead of producing spatial quality. In the period between the two oil crises (1973 and 1979) spatial dynamics slowed down considerably and public spending cuts were severe, except on housing and urban renewal.

Around the year 1990 the economic downturn had passed; the demand for spatial development grew again, and the national budget increased again. Parts of central government revenue from natural gas production were dedicated to investments in infrastructure and soil decontamination, a new field of interest for national politics. The foreseeable growth of the European market into a 'single market' by the year 1992 was met with great enthusiasm and was used as a new perspective by planners. This was consolidated in the Fourth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning (1988) in a ambitious programme of growing 'mainports (global gateways)' (The Port of Rotterdam and Amsterdam Schiphol Airport), the creation of new hinterland connections or continental corridors (road and rail) to Belgium and Germany, and the development of selected cities into 'urban nodes' of national and international importance. The Supplement to this Fourth Policy Document (VINEX, 1993) contained considerable investments to improve environmental quality and a huge programme of urbanization for the whole of the Netherlands for the period 1995-2005, in 1998 extended to the year 2010. The Supplement acquired the epithet 'VINEX' leading to a series of 'VINEX locations', that have alternately been scorned and praised. As the 'VINEX policy' was being implemented around the year 2000 new policies were in preparation that would have resulted in a Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning, but the years of liberal-socialist coalition governments (from 1994 onwards) were numbered and a significant change of direction took place. A period of political instability began and traditional mainstream parties could no longer count on the support of their voters. Decentralization and stimulation of development instead of containing (urban) development were the new catchwords written into the 'National Spatial Planning Strategy' of 2006. Around that time, the Planning Agency had been reorganized: the research function was taken away and incorporated into a newly created independent

Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research. The Spatial Planning Act had been completely revised by the year 2008. By that time, the rapid recovery from the 2002 dot.com bubble had turned into the nightmare of the current credit and financial crises.

The last year of change on the calendar is 2010 when the housing and office markets ground to a halt. A new minority cabinet turned towards radical decentralization and deregulation. The government budget was downsized (e.g. an end was put to all urbanization subsidies) and the remit of national spatial planning interests was reduced in the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning. A radical makeover of the whole legislative system for the physical domain (planning, nature, infrastructure, water etc.) is in preparation. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment was split up and the Spatial Planning Agency swallowed up in a new Directorate-General for Spatial Planning and Water Management in the new Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment. Spatial planning is no longer visible in the name of the ministry.

### 2 Ministers

Ministers responsible for national spatial planning have come from all national political denominations except the communists and some very small parties. As all governments in the Netherlands are coalitions we are used to distinguishing first the colour of the cabinet that produces policies, and then the colour of the minister. In the calendar we distinguish: **blue** for Liberal-Christian cabinets, **red** for Socialist-Christian cabinets, and **purple** for Socialist-Liberal cabinets. Over the years ministers have been 9x Socialists, 7x Christian Democrats, 6x Liberals, 2x Liberal Democrats, 1x Christian Orthodox and 1x without party affiliation. Some ministers were experts in the field when they started. Two were twice Minister of Spatial Planning, so most of them only served for one cabinet period. One occupant held the post for a record 7 years (Witte, a Christian Democrat).

### 3 Six major national policy documents

This series of policy documents concentrates on the major documents that have spatial policy 'content' in the form of spatial concepts, programmes and general directives. These are the documents that have been approved by parliament. There are scores of other reports and studies that have been of influence, but to give a good overview here the major ones with a significant political status are illustrated. The first two come from the formative years. "Het westen ... en overig Nederland" [The West and the rest of The Netherlands] (1956) and "Ontwikkeling van het Westen des Lands" [The future development of the West of the country] (1958) led to the first formal parliamentary request for national spatial policy. Both documents contained the outline of the policies that later were formalized in the First, and most of all, in the Second National Policy Documents on Spatial Planning (1966). The Second document produced the concept of 'clustered suburbanization' that was made operational in the decision to develop new towns and to

restrict urban development in the so-called 'green heart' of the west. The Third Policy Document was in fact a long series of policy documents, the result of modern process planning that started in 1973 with 'Oriënteringsnota ruimtelijke ordening' or the First part of the Third National Policy Document on Spatial Planning. It helped to put the policies of the Second document into practice, although with changes. An important result was the 'Structuurschets voor de landelijke en stedelijke gebieden' [National Structure Plan for the Rural and Urban Areas] (1986) that set out the policies for urbanization, recreation, nature conservation and landscape development, that is to say, the whole gamut of spatial themes except transport infrastructure (they had their own national policy documents).

The Fourth document was not ratified by parliament because the government had resigned, so it is not depicted in the calendar. The Supplement of the Fourth document (1993), which parliament ratified after extended discussions, contains all the policies of the stranded Fourth document plus additional policies for the environment and for urbanization. By the same token the 'Actualisering Vinex' [Update of the Supplement to the Fourth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning] (1998) is also included. After that a turbulent period ensued. The draft of the next document (2002) also did not achieve parliamentary approval because that government also resigned prematurely. It was transformed into the 'Nota Ruimte' [National Planning Strategy, without number but in fact the Fifth] (2006) and supplemented by the Randstad 2040 Policy Strategy (2008). The policies of the National Planning Strategy and its supplements have been considerably pared down in the latest document "Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte" [National Policy Strategy on Infrastructure and Spatial Planning] of 2012. This document contains all of the (almost unchanged) national transport policies together with much reduced spatial policies; that combination is a remarkable innovation.

#### 4 Policy concepts

Spatial planning can be recognized by its use of 'spatial concepts' that express in a nutshell, in words or images, what spatial developments are intended for. Some concepts have been employed for a very long time, some were only short-lived. On numerous occasions the label of the concept remained unchanged but the content was altered. 'Urban region' is a case in point. It was the central notion for the organization of space in urbanized regions, but it could mean a well-defined administrative entity, a fluid geographical area defined by commuter relations, or a morphologically defined built-up area.

The concepts presented here are subdivided according to spatial scale: the Netherlands in North-Western Europe, the West and the Rest, concepts for Randstad Holland [the West], for urban regions and concepts for the green spaces.

#### 5 Tools

National spatial policy has never been in the position of being a big spender. Spatial policy was always thought to be first and foremost a matter

of coordination, that is coordination of spatial aspects of "sectoral" policies between ministries and between central government, the provinces and the municipalities. So 'own' funding was never an important tool but having influence over the budgets of other ministries was. Efforts in the years after 2000 to wrestle a 'spatial' budget from the treasury succeeded twice but have now ceased indefinitely.

Other tools are more important. The Planning Act is one. It stipulates procedures, not content, for spatial plans that can be drawn up by central government, provinces and municipalities. Municipalities are the basis of this soft-hierarchical system. They are obliged to produce legally binding local land use plans for the whole of their territorial area. Substantive central government policies 'work through' in other plans by means of coordination and negotiation. Negotiation may take the form of package deals; a good example are the 'VINEX covenants' from the 1990's that made the integrated development of new urban areas possible with limited state subsidies.

Legal tools have a limited role, since 2012 limited to 13 'national interests' that have been specified in the newest National Policy Strategy, plus a legal underpinning in a General Administrative Order. However, if provinces or municipalities do not cooperate sufficiently, central government can push through its own projects (e.g. roads, electricity networks) by making directly binding state land use plans and by issuing building permits on the basis of those plans.

#### 6 Organization

To produce spatial policies you need a 'workshop', that is the nucleus of a central organization for spatial planning. First came the Agency for the National Plan **RNP** (1941), in 1965 renamed the National Spatial Planning Agency **RPD**. Both organizations produced policies but also carried out high quality spatial policy research. In the year 2002 this policy research function was deemed by the government to be conflicting with the policy function, so a number of staff was transferred to the new Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research **RPB**. The other part of the agency was in turn integrated into a regular policy department (Directoraat-Generaal Ruimte, **DGR**), in 2010 recombined into the Directorate-General for Spatial Planning and Water Management **DGRW**. The 'workshop' was always part of a ministry. That started as Ministry of Reconstruction **Wederopbouw**, then renamed into Housing and Spatial Planning **VRO**, to be completed with the Environment **VROM**. Since 2010 the ministry has been called Infrastructure and the Environment **I en M**.

Policy-making by the government is prepared by committees that coordinate decision-making before it reaches ministerial levels. Important committees in the field of spatial planning at director-general level have a long pedigree: since 1941 the Vaste Commissie **VC**, (Permanent Committee) after 1965 called the Rijksplanologische Commissie **RPC**, (National Spatial Planning Committee) and its successor the Commissie voor Duurzame Leefomgeving **CDL**, (Committee

for Sustainable Development). Since 2010 the Commissie Infrastructuur en Milieu **CI en M** (Committee for Infrastructure and Environmental Policy) is the last non-political stage of spatial policy making. For some twenty years a parallel universe had existed in the form of a special committee for national investments in economic development (infrastructure, but also environment, nature and urbanization), headed by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs **ICES** (Interministerial Committee for Investments in Economic Development). In practice this committee had a decisive voice in spatial investments and consequently in spatial policies.

To give shape to the voice of the people, in 1965 an advisory body was set up ("Raad van Advies voor de Ruimtelijke Ordening" [Advisory Council for Spatial Planning] **RARO**), later broadened into the **VROMRaad** [Advisory Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment] and since 2012 part of the much more comprehensive "Raad voor Leefomgeving en Infrastructuur" [Advisory Council for the Environment] **RLI**. At the same time the **RPB** was combined with the Environmental Assessment Agency **PBL**. The point of this organizational history is to illustrate that national spatial planning for some 60 years had its own workshop with dedicated organizations around it, and that since around the year 2000 spatial policy has become a modest part of an emerging comprehensive policy field that can be titled 'environmental policy'.

#### 7 Icons

The aim of spatial policy is to influence physical reality. That may take a long time, but it is the proof of the pudding. Physical reality takes shape because of thousands of actors, tools and ideas. In the calendar we have selected fourteen 'icons' of spatial development in the Netherlands where national policies have had a decisive influence. The icons represent a broad range of situations that have been chosen by an expert committee on the basis of public (internet) votes. Visit them and you feel the flavor of national spatial policy in a self-made country.

#### Further reading

Hans van der Cammen and Len de Klerk, with Gerhard Dekker and Peter Paul Witsen, 2012, *The Self-made land. Culture and evolution of urban and regional planning in The Netherlands*, Houten: Spectrum.

A. Faludi and A. van der Valk, 1994, *Rule and order. Dutch planning doctrine in the twentieth century*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Jelte Boeijenga and Jeroen Mensink, 2008, *Vinex Atlas*, Rotterdam: 010 (Dutch/English, lavishly documented).

The complete list of icons numbers 35. See [www.canonro.nl](http://www.canonro.nl) and Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, 2012, *35 icons of Dutch spatial planning/35 iconen van ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland*.

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