

Draft

The various faces of place-based local initiatives: versions of subpolitics in the making?

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Governments nowadays rather often organize events to invite public participation in public policy making, and researchers develop theories and do empirical studies as to how this is or should be done. But citizens, societal organizations, private enterprise or combinations of these also attempt to influence policy making at their own time, regarding their own 'place', and on their own conditions. While Beck stated in the 1990s that society is increasingly being shaped from below and from outside the representative institutions of the formal political system, which he summarized by the term 'subpolitics', he did not particularly direct his thesis at small-scale initiatives for specific places. The latter task is the subject of this paper. To uncover *in what sense* present day local initiatives could be characterized as 'subpolitical', it is suggested that exploring the interconnections between discourses and institutional practices may be a particularly fruitful way. By means of qualitative analysis of three private initiatives, in three specific Dutch places, and particularly by studying what exactly happens in their interactions with 'established' policies, different versions of subpolitics are uncovered: more open or more closed versions, and versions which can be distinguished on the basis of whether discursive change goes together with a change of institutional practices or not.

Introduction

Deliberative practices such as citizen forums, panels or juries have recently become more popular, not the least as a topic of empirical research (Thompson 2008, Rosenberg (ed.) 2007, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). In the Netherlands, the background to these practices is formed by a low and unstable voter turnout, historically low membership of political parties, and the coming and going of new political parties which are based on single personalities or single issues (WRR 2004). Perhaps in these circumstances more than ever, deliberative practices can be viewed as an additional route to shaping democracy. Deliberative practices often have a highly organized character and (obviously) a clear aim: the formulation of decisions about a specific issue, often in relation to a specific place. Government institutions mostly take initiative to organize these 'deliberations'. Akkerman et al. speak of these in terms of 'democratisation from above' (Akkerman et al. 2004). Analysts are often critical about the real intentions of participation methods such as 'interactive policymaking' and their implementation (Hartman 2000, De Vries 2008). However, the assumption that involving 'the local people' with their 'situated knowledge' in an early stage of decision making will improve the quality and outcome of decision-making is to increasing extents a subject of empirical investigation, and the latter surely does not just give rise to criticism (see Rosenberg (ed.) 2007 and Hajer and Wagenaar (eds) 2003 for compilations, Yanow 2003, Healey 2003, Fischer 2001).

In the 'deliberative democracy' research domain, I think an important question should be what happens if an initiative for deliberation is local, informal and not organized from above. In another, sociological research domain Ulrich Beck refers to informal, 'bottom-up' initiatives by means of the term 'subpolitics'. By means of this term he wishes to articulate

that society is increasingly being shaped from below and from outside the representative institutions of the formal political system. Beck places this trend in the context of the emergence of the 'risk society', where the rules and institutions of classical industrial society no longer offer a basis for certainty and even generate the very risks they aim to control, and where the individual has to find new certainties for him or herself (Beck, 1997, 1994). He refers to large-scale consumer initiatives linking local events to global issues, such as the consumer protests against dumping the oil rig Brent Spar. In this paper, I look at the possibilities of applying the subpolitics-thesis to less massive, small scale private initiatives. Are these also signs of subpolitics and if yes, in what sense are they? What kind of deliberations evolve from them? Do these initiatives stay informal, or do they become part of mainstream politics? Are they able to change institutions? Who participates, and who don't? And what can be learned from them in terms of the subpolitics thesis? In my opinion, these initiatives are never too small to be recognized for their deliberative potential. As Fung puts this nicely into words when he speaks of minipublics:

“Though small, they are among the most promising constructive efforts for civic engagement and public deliberation in contemporary politics. (...) given the fragmentation of cultural and political life, effective large-scale public sphere reforms may consist largely in the proliferation of better minipublics rather than improving the one big public” (Fung, 2007).

Often local initiatives come about in response to government policy and not seldom there has been a prior conflict in the scope of the latter's implementation; the local initiators challenge the government policies' contents because they are of the opinion that their area requires alternative, or additional measures. It is important to note here that I consider deliberation about policy as a potential means of democratization and as a supplement to conventional electoral democracy, not just if these deliberations are organized from above, but if they evolve from local initiatives as well. Therefore I look at discussions about alternatives to established government policy as a way for the public to express their concerns, exchange arguments about these with others, learn and develop their ideas, and possibly influence policy making in a more argumentative way than polling once in every four years or so (see also Torgerson 2003). Surely, it is not *by definition* that the deliberations evolving from local initiatives are themselves sufficiently democratic. This is what always needs to be verified. But in view of the search for alternative routes to democracy, I consider it as problematic that the confrontations between diverging initiatives and established policy have not been investigated as much as the deliberations which had been organized 'from above'. I consider different explanations plausible for this lack. One certainly is that the public eye gets more easily attracted to the formal occasions of deliberation. The initiators expect much from the outcomes of the events organized by them, and the media are mostly mobilized to play a role in one or more of the stages of deliberation. Also, research budgets are more often allocated to study government-initiated interactions with the public. But informal initiatives sometimes *do* get a lot of attention, especially if they are large-scale and relate to global issues, Beck's cases being the perfect examples.

However, Beck's thesis can also be related to initiatives that are *not* mere responses to perceived global risks. These may be initiatives evolving from ideas to overcome a deadlock situation at the local level, or from a pro-active desire to innovate in situations where strong feelings of risk or uncertainty are absent. Moreover, it tempts one to distinguish between various versions of subpolitics. Subjecting the thesis to empirical investigation can inform

us about the conditions in which different versions of subpolitics can come about, and perhaps uncover how these versions develop over time and turn from one into another. In particular, the cases presented here offer the opportunity to uncover in what sense the subpolitics thesis applies to informal, local (or specific, place-based) initiatives. That, then, enables to become more specific about the thesis as well, and makes it possible to identify different versions of subpolitics. In such a way, normative theory (Becks' subpolitics thesis) and empirical study (the cases which formed the basis for this paper), can enrich each other.

The cases discussed here are about local, informal initiatives in three specific spatial areas in different parts of the Netherlands. The case studies made part of my PhD research. I was involved in them as an Action Researcher. As such, I had relatively easy access to specific episodes, either because I made part of them or because involved actors directly related about these episodes (for more detailed descriptions of the cases, as well as a (critical) reflection on methodological issues, see Buizer 2008).

The main questions that I wish to deal with here are *in what sense* these cases are and in what sense they are not manifestations of subpolitics. The specific places figuring in the three cases offer a basis to become more specific about the 'in what sense', and provide the possibility to render a place-based account of the possible meanings of subpolitics. This, then, can be a start to further substantiate the mentioned claim that discourse about policy making can indeed be a means of democratization.

In the following first the cases will shortly be presented. Then Beck's subpolitics thesis will be described and operationalized. I will argue that for the sake of operationalization, uncovering the interconnections between discourses and institutional practices is a particularly fruitful (epistemological) exercise. Then, the three cases will shortly be described by means of these concepts. The contribution concludes by presenting five versions of subpolitics as well as some suggestions about what this variety possibly means for present day ambitions to establish new modes of 'deliberative governance', or, for that matter, a subpolitical society.

Three cases

The first case – Biesland – concerns an agricultural enclave situated in the midst of the cities, towns and recreation areas of the Randstad, in the West of the Netherlands. There is only one active farm family left in the area. The state has bought most of the land from farmers, for urban development or for the establishment of nature areas and parks, to be managed by private or state-led nature organizations. But a coalition to do things differently slowly grows. The farmer, together with civil servants (often in their private time), local residents (forming an active foundation 'friends of Biesland') and researchers, worked out a far reaching concept of 'nature-oriented' farming which would, at the same time, be geared to enhance opportunities for various types of recreational activities, schooling and care. The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) was enthusiastic and promised early in the process to finance half of the plans, provided that the other half would be financed by regional parties. He also stated that the European Commission should first approve payments to the farmer. This is where a lengthy process to get the idea implemented started. Now the question is in what sense this process of coalition formation on the basis of alternative ideas, and engagement in policy dialogue about these ideas would indeed be subpolitics, and in what sense it would not.

The second case – Grensschap - involved a group of residents who organized themselves as 'the Grensschap' after an 'interactive event' which the municipality of Maastricht and the Ministry (ANF) had organized 'from the top down' in 2003. With their name the members of the Grensschap referred to the specific area as well as to themselves as a group. They aimed to influence the land use in a green zone between the Dutch municipality of Maastricht and the Belgian municipalities of Riemst and Lanaken. They proved to be more than just a flash in the pan. For years, Dutch and Belgian residents and civil servants (mostly residents as well) collaborated to organize various activities in order to share with each other what each of them knew about the area. The area, which did not have a name until then, was named 'the Grensschap' in order to point at the role of the Dutch-Belgian border as a binding element in the landscape ('Grens' means border). The members of the Grensschap were not the kind of people that would use a strategy of open resistance against, for instance, building activities. What they wanted most of all was to be incorporated into the decision making process as 'reasonable experts' with plenty of local knowledge on various dimensions of the area. They actively sought people that could represent all kinds of knowledge, such as its human history, archeology, geology and ecology. Some of the members knew about these because of their professional background, others because of their hobbies or because they had lived in the area for a long time. It had long been considered as a 'no man's land' and that was what they wanted to get rid of. The area was also subject to extensive and rapid change. A recreational park was under construction at the Dousberg, linked to the existing swimming pool; the activities of the loam industry were being intensified; and, in addition to the industries that were already present in the area, expansion of housing and industrial areas was foreseen on both sides of the border. As a consequence, the area had not been considered as one whole. This story invokes questions about the kind of politics practiced here. How far reached the Grensschap's their influence?

In the third case – the Loonsche Land – the theme park 'the Efteling' and two nature conservation organizations reached an agreement about the development of a joint land use management plan, which was spelled out in a covenant. The initiative came about after years of conflict between these parties over the building of accommodation in an area of woods and fields bordering the Efteling theme park and owned by them: conflict which led to legal cases that went right up to the Council of State. Behind these episodes figured the compensation policies of the Dutch national and provincial governments, implying that every building activity in areas that were formally designated as 'nature', would have to be compensated by the creation of 'new nature'. For instance, in the relevant Province of Noord-Brabant, every 'lost' hectare of forest of an age in between 25 and 100 years, needed to be compensated by a factor of 1.66. So the legal cases were mainly about the compensation plans that the Efteling submitted; for the nature organizations the proposed compensation was not enough and for the Efteling it was. The exchange of documents that supported the legal procedure would for instance be about the ecological value of a fertilized field of maize and how that would need to be compensated. In the end, the Council of State did not come to a conclusion but annulled the case for procedural reasons. That was the time when the involved parties eventually had enough of the deadlock situation, in which nobody really got what they wanted. The former opponents developed an alternative vision in which they let go of the nature compensation idea. Now what were the consequences of this strategy, and could these reasonably be referred to as subpolitics?

The three cases represent situations in which politics and policies 'as usual' did not bring the desired 'place-based' policies that involved participants would like to see for 'their' places.

Thus, they engaged in alternative kinds of politics to get their ideas realized. To come to conclusions about the kind of politics that they engaged in, and their subpolitical character, I will first delve into this theoretical concept.

Subpo litics

By means of the term 'subpolitics', Beck seeks to articulate the trend that society is increasingly being shaped from below. In his work so far, focus was on global citizen movements emerging under influence of feelings of danger and risks, real or anticipated. Beck's famous examples are the world-wide movement against nuclear testing at Mururoa, the mass consumer protests against the disposal of an obsolete oil rig 'Brentspar' in the North Sea (Beck, 1996, 1997), and the BSE crisis, the public perception of which, according to Beck, gave rise to the fastest passage of laws in the history of the German Republic (Beck et al., 2003: 14).

"The concept of 'sub-politics' refers to politics outside and beyond the representative institutions of the political system of nation-states. It focuses attention on signs of an (ultimately global) self-organization of politics, which tends to set all areas of society in motion. Sub-politics means '*direct*' politics – that is, *ad hoc* individual participation in political decisions, bypassing the institutions of representative opinion-formation (political parties, parliaments) and often even lacking the protection of the law. In other words, sub-politics means the shaping of society from below" (Beck 1996: 18).

How does this idea about a global politics beyond the representative institutions of representative democracy, relate to the initiatives addressed here? Obviously, these initiatives are not about 'global movements'. Instead, they relate to the very local and specific of everyday places. As they have respect to areas adjacent to cities or within urban agglomerations the initiatives reach further than a neighborhood park or a street, but they are still very local as compared to the global examples that Beck refers to. Also, they are not about the kind of risks or major hazards that Beck speaks of in his examples, but about positive action that the initiators wish to take in order to improve these specific places. Still, Beck's thesis seems to deserve application to initiatives with a local, territorial orientation as well. A leading question then is: *in what sense* could one speak of subpolitics in these situations?

But how does one investigate such a question, which is still quite general? This means that the analyst needs to be enabled to become more specific about the 'in what sense'-part of the question.

Making a distinction between discourses and institutional practices offers some guidance at this point. From among a variety of approaches to discourse and institutional analysis, I chose to take on a perspective which emphasizes both discourse and institutional practices and particularly their relationship (Arts and Buizer, forthcoming). In such a way, I would like to put emphasis on the whole range of ways in which events are interpreted or given meaning to, not just in words or 'discussion', which is the literal translation of the French word 'discours' (discourse is often used as discussion). A discursive institutional approach includes analysis of the practice of using a language, but it also comprises various kinds of other institutional practices, such as ways to delineate land, specific allocations of resources, or the enactment of rules which legitimate a specific type of organizational structure to control management of the land, and not others. Discourse *steers* such practices and is also,

vice versa, *influenced* by them. To give expression to this relationship, some authors choose to incorporate discourse and institutional practices in one and the same definition (Hajer 1995). But in my view, it is necessary for practical and methodological purposes to *distinguish between* discourse and institutional practices. Not doing so would collapse the two separable elements, which is the same risk lying in wait when operationalizing Giddens' duality of structure and agency (Giddens 1984, Archer, 1995, 1996) and makes it practically impossible to investigate their relationship, particularly in the course of time.

So discourse is the way in which a specific idea is categorized and conceptualized, not just in words but in deeds as well. Vivian Schmidt, who has recently suggested to add 'discursive institutionalism' to the three main 'institutionalisms' (rational actor, historical, sociological), phrases this as follows:

"Discourse is not just ideas or 'text' (what is said) but also context (where, when, how, and why it is said). The term refers not only to structure (what is said, or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom)" (Schmidt, 2008: 305).

Speaking of discourse in such a way turns it explicitly into a relational concept (see also Healey, 2003) or an interactive process. Schmidt:

"(...) discourse as an interactive process is what enables agents to change institutions, because the deliberative nature of discourse allows them to conceive of and talk about institutions as objects at a distance, and to dissociate themselves from them, even as they continue to use them" (Schmidt, 2008: 316).

Similarly, institutions stand in particular *relationships* to people: even though they are structures, they also exist in the minds of people, either as unconscious 'baggage', or as conscious ability to 'think beyond' the institutions within which people act. Schmidt refers to Searle and Habermas when she refers to these abilities as, respectively, 'background ideational abilities' and 'foreground discursive abilities' (Schmidt, 2008: 315-316).

'Background ideational abilities' are internal to individual actors. They "encompass the human capacities, dispositions, and know-how (knowledge of how the world works and how to cope with it (...)) and signify what goes on in individual minds as they come up with new ideas" (ibid.: 315). Foreground discursive abilities refer to what can be done collectively by engaging in deliberations about institutions. The latter concept is especially important, because it enables to understand how actors, in collective efforts, are able to change institutions. As such, a discursive institutional approach corrects the lack of agency in the other three institutional approaches. Here as well, it is in such a way that the relationship between discourse and institutional practices is viewed. Such a relational approach to discourse and institutional practices, in my view, facilitates to describe the details of their interactions in specific places.

Now subpolitics, in discursive institutional terms, is about the ideational and discursive abilities of agents to change institutional practices, while these agents are at the same time operating within the institutions that are bringing forth these practices. Self-organization here, thus, does not refer to isolated initiatives which are completely out of touch with present day institutions, but to initiatives that are still related to these institutions. The initiatives may be a consequence of the existing institutional practices and the initiators may be aware of them, so that they can skillfully use their knowledge about them to promote their own ideas. And with regard to the representative institutions, we have to see whether,

when using these transformative abilities, actors disregard ('by-pass') these entirely or whether they still make use of these in some way to achieve their ideas. Subpolitics, then, may refer to the introduction of new ideas in policy debates while institutional arrangements remain stable. But the latter, due to the introduction of these ideas, may also appear to be changeable or, in Lowndes' terms, malleable (Lowndes et al. 2006).

In the following, I will look at three cases, in which local initiators wanted to make a difference to specific places that they felt connected to. They could not make this difference without confronting established policies. What did the local actors do with their ideational and discursive abilities in the three cases, and how did that change (or not) institutional practices? What does this tell us about subpolitics? What 'versions of subpolitics' can be derived from the three cases?

Co mpe ting di scourse and i nstitu tio nal pra ctices in t hree sp ecifi c pla ces

Case: farming and nature in an urbanizing area

In the Biesland case, the leading discourse behind policies to acquire land from farmers was twofold: firstly nature was better off if the land would be owned by nature organizations, and secondly farming would not be able to accommodate the wishes of urban dwellers, who wanted recreation and forests. Internal market discourse of the European Union, which is based on the idea that farmers can be paid for nature oriented activities only to the extent that this will not distort competition with other farmers in Europe, played a major role as well; it eventually determined the future of the initiative. The ideas behind the initiative deviated from these mainstream discourses: here it was essential that nature and agriculture could well be combined. Despite this difference, the initiative gradually obtained support from regional administrators and politicians, financially as well. For them, the idea of combining farming and nature management in an urban environment could co-exist with the earlier mentioned idea that nature and agriculture should be separated. However, that co-existence of discourses in the Biesland-area did not translate into changed practices (e.g. a decrease of purchases of land) elsewhere. And even in the Biesland-area itself, historical claims on parts of the agricultural land continued to exist. The fact that the new ideas did get realized to some extent may be due to the 'conscious' discursive abilities of the local coalition. They were aware of the way of reasoning of key decision makers who were holding on to the idea of agriculture versus nature, and they were also aware that what would be needed to convince their opponents was to conform to the practice of making prognoses of 'nature target types' that were expected to occur as a result of the new type of farm management. So they carried out the studies that would underpin the 'nature target types' that government officials expected, even if the point of departure of such a study was contrary to the initiators' own point of departure that nature could not be predicted in such a way. Instead they thought that nature values were very much context dependent and unpredictable, that they depended on available ecological conditions. Moreover, in order to fit within the 'internal market discourse', they also provided all the detailed data that would enable officials in Brussels to carry out the 'state aid procedure', a practice connected to the internal market discourse. Thus, they operated in the existing institutions to get their ideas accepted and in fact reinforced existing institutional practices by doing so. This could be looked at as co-option, but for the initiators it was at this time a way to get on with their ideas. But at the same time they were also using their discursive abilities to think and speak outside the existing institutions, and they kept their original ideas in full sight. After years

of political decision-making in Brussels and conversations between Dutch and European Commission officials, the plan of the local coalition was approved. Now the question is in what sense this was subpolitics. The Biesland coalition more or less achieved what they wanted in their specific local situation, but with no perspective of giving inspiration to other places in the Netherlands; this road was blocked in the final European decision. Also, the contents of their ideas shifted in the direction of national and European policy frameworks while the initiators used their 'discursive abilities' to fit their ideas within the latter. This caused implementation of a blurred version of the ideas. We may come to a different conclusion however in a few years time, when the 'blurred version' of the local idea will be evaluated and lead to delayed effects. For the moment this can only be speculated about however. Importantly these shifts in the contents of the ideas, and the continuation of 'practices-as-usual' in other places, were not debated in the formal arenas of representative politics, nor in other informal arenas. The project was being communicated about, in personal communications and during excursions to the farm, through a website and an e-newsletter, but how the initiators had had to change their plans and how this kept the mainstream discourse in place, did not become an issue of deliberation. This nuances the manifestation of subpolitics as it occurred in Biesland. In sum, the case *is* a manifestation of subpolitics in the sense that alternative discourse could co-exist with mainstream discourse, and in the sense that local actors realized part of what they envisioned. But no, it was not, in the sense that the alternative ideas (and the related proposed institutional practices) did not become part of public deliberations about what they could possibly mean in other areas or for mainstream policies.

Case: Dutch and Belgian citizens placing a 'no man's land' at the agenda

In terms of discourse, the case reveals, on the one hand, that the area was looked at in a fragmented or segmented way, as a 'no man's land' where there were still plenty of opportunities to expand various functions. This way of looking was represented by the Dutch and Belgian municipal sectors and developers. It was being challenged by the integrative Grensschap's discourse on the other hand. The area's border, as well as its history, geology, built environment and ecology, were accentuated as binding factors. In the view of the members of the Grensschap, integration and the relationships which could still be perceived in the landscape would need to be the point of departure when building activities were going to take place.

The main part of the involved municipal administrations however continued to look at the area *not as an area* in which various features would need to be balanced, but solely as a potential zone for expansion. This was expressed by their institutional practices, such as the planning process for the Zouwdal, which was split up in sectoral studies (rather than combining these). And as it was the deliberate strategy of the members of the Grensschap not to explicitly oppose against activities that were decided already; confrontations on issues of content were less actively sought and were even avoided. They did so on the basis of their 'foreground discursive abilities'; they knew what would be controversial and what would not. Thus, they literally used their ability to think outside the institutions to be able to continue to act *within* these. However, their avoidance of confrontations also took away the chance of deliberation on the contents of their own ideas and how these differed from reigning ideas about that specific landscape. All in all, I would argue that the Grensschap *is* a manifestation of subpolitics in the sense that it shows the emergence of a new movement, based on feelings of connectedness to a specific place and with great value attached to local

knowledge, rather than the formal knowledge bases that are used, recognized and valued by governments. In terms of influence on outcomes however, this statement must be qualified. Their strong ideas on how elements of the landscape were connected to each other and on how this should be acknowledged in planning efforts, *did* appeal to some politicians and officials, especially the ones dealing with the qualities of the landscape that the members of the Grensschap were also concerned about. And they were able to realize a project that was for them important because it did carry their message: fourteen 'landmarks', each representing the qualities of the area and telling a story about the coherence of the landscape. The landmarks were to show how each of these qualities related to the landscape 'on the place', *and* how that place could be seen in relation to the other places. However, it seemed not to influence the part of the administration with most weight as regards the fragmented type of decision-making that had also characterized decision-making before the 'Grensschap' came into being.

Case: Theme park and nature organizations breaking an impasse

In the Loonsche Land case, the compensation discourse gave rise to fierce opposition between actors representing building activities (the theme park) and actors representing nature (the nature organizations) because it stimulated each of them to think in terms of their own interests. For a long time, the compensation discourse was reproduced in this struggle; the hostility that characterized these interactions militated against the willingness to engage in collaborative approaches. But in 2004, with a court decision about the proposed compensation still pending and the process on the verge of being repeated all over again – in other words, with the situation only getting worse – everybody wanted a way out. The idea that provided such a way out was more integral and qualitative in character. Again, it addressed the area as a whole and got its inspiration from stories behind the landscape. 'Economy' and 'nature' were no longer viewed as contradictory or incompatible. It boiled down to the imposition of ecological conditions on the building of apartments and it also emphasized the overall improvement of the area in terms of nature values and cultural history. The shift of practice, from operating through legal procedures to engaging in face-to-face discussions and formulating a joint vision, required a broader outlook from both parties and an ability to replace thinking in terms of 'either-or' by thinking in terms of 'and-and', up to the extent that this was possible. Both parties were content with the plan that came out of the common endeavor. However, whereas an area-oriented approach such as this one, building on collaboration between various public and private parties were gaining ground, the fundamental principles of the Nature Compensation discourse, whose built-in bias towards claim-making practices had triggered the confrontational approach, continued to hold sway. The most remarkable aspect of this is perhaps that there was so little discussion about the enabling and constraining effects of compensation policy.

The case shows us another example of subpolitics if it is viewed from the angle of the emergence of new coalitions outside the representative system, making use of their discursive abilities to break through an impasse which was created by the powerful 'nature compensation'-discourse. However, it is important to note here that the new partners kept their process rather closed. They wanted to avoid interference of other groups (more radical nature organizations or more fervent business oriented actors) which would perhaps cling to the principles of either nature compensation, or business development. This lack of openness was most likely not what Ulrich Beck thought of when he spoke of subpolitics. Still, considering the discursive space that the former opponents created between themselves, and

the ways in which they involved the bureaucracy (thereby circumventing political decisions), I still see sufficient reason to include this particular place-based series of events as another variation of subpolitics. But what is perhaps more important is that the events did not give rise to any form of deliberation about the consequences of nature compensation policy. So despite the new discourse and the 'place-based' innovation, repercussions for mainstream discourse, which remained firmly embedded in its connected compensation practices, stayed away.

The various faces of subpolitics

To substantiate the thought that small scale, place-based initiatives may point at versions of subpolitics which add to the large scale examples described by Beck, I needed to examine *in what sense* the subpolitics thesis would be valid for these small-scale initiatives. So far, I used three Dutch examples. To operationalize the subpolitics-thesis, which is about contents (impact) as well as about process, I looked at discourses and institutional practices and particularly at the relationship between them. I expected that putting discourse at the foreground, while at the same time not losing sight of what was actually *done* in terms of institutional practices, would highlight what institutional change did take place in the course of the interactions between the mentioned initiatives and established policies, and what institutional practices were reproduced and stabilized.

Doing so gave rise to a nuanced picture of what subpolitics could actually involve in situations such as the ones described here. From the cases, I derived five versions of subpolitics. The versions can be distinguished by looking at the ways in which the introduction of new ideas went hand in hand with a change of institutional practices, or how they did not, and by looking at their relative openness or closedness. Other dimensions are time and place: a relatively closed version of subpolitics may become more open in the course of time, or a version in which discursive change does go together with a change of institutional practices at the local level, may not give rise to wider (cross-place) institutional reflection and change.

In the first version of subpolitics, the introduction of new ideas for a specific area, ideas not coming forth from the representative system, goes together with a change of institutional practices. Place-related actors join forces to directly influence the policies which are of relevance to 'their' area. So it was not just 'words' or 'ideas' that changed: new practices came about along with the new ideas. New coalitions were formed around these new ideas in all three of the cases, and institutional practices sometimes changed significantly along with that. The integrative idea of the cross-border 'Grensschap'-area for instance, formerly a 'no-man's land' in which sectoral interests could mostly still find a place to expand, was connected to the 'Grensschap' as an organization with strong informal rules about how to go about with the area and with each other.

In the second and third versions of subpolitics there is discursive change as well: new ideas get accentuated in relation to a particular place, and new actor-coalitions are mobilized to realize these ideas. However, these versions differ from the first if a time- and a place dimension are taken into account. In the second version the contents of what is proposed from outside the representative system shifts in the direction of dominant policy discourses and practices in the course of time. Initiators do so deliberately: they use their discursive abilities to assess what kind of shift is necessary to get their ideas accepted. An important

question to distinguish the first from the second version is whether it changes policy vocabulary only or institutional practices as well. The cases in the above demonstrated how these shifts may come in different intensities and in different timings: early as in the Grensschap case, where the initiators took into account mainstream ways of thinking from the beginning onwards, or later, as in the Efteling case, where the initiators took a deliberate distance from the way of thinking that had brought them into deadlock, but translated 'back' their ideas in a later stage to the mainstream 'compensation discourse', in order to get their plans accepted.

In the third version, discursive change did translate into a change of institutional practices, but these turned out to be valid only in the specific place where the initiative originated, so that it could be implemented there, but not elsewhere. It also means that we need to ask in cases where both discourse and institutional practices are changed, whether that change is directed at the specific place of origin of the initiative only or whether it also has wider policy implications.

The fourth and fifth versions of 'subpolitics' standing out in the cases distinguish itself not so much on the basis of the relationship between discourse and institutional practices, as they do on the basis of the extent to which they are open or closed to a variety of actors. These versions may overlap with the others: thus the initiative may be characterized by discursive change and institutional malleability, and at the same time be closed *or* open. (Further research will have to show whether there is a relationship between the two.) The fourth version is a relatively closed subpolitics. Perceiving (relatively) closed local initiatives as a potential means of democratization may be a too long jump, but I would still like to take them into consideration as a locus for deliberation about policy development. And after all, closed initiatives may turn into open ones or they may set the stage for a wider debate. A closed subpolitics was most clearly present in the Efteling case: a private enterprise and two societal organizations (which were open membership organizations) engaged in an initiative on the basis of ideas deviating from established policies. However, this new partnership remained closed: other participants were not allowed into it because they feared that this could lead to internal conflicts. . Thus, we need to acknowledge that subpoliticization does not necessarily imply democratization. The way in which some actors are included, while others do not make part of the game, is still an important point of consideration.

Naturally the fifth variant of subpolitics is a more open variant with changed discourse and changed institutional practices with respect to the specific place that the initiative came forth from, but which also involved broader deliberation about the consequences of these changes for wider policy development. Because 'open' and 'closed' are not absolute terms, a relevant question with regard to this version remains is *who* can participate and who still cannot, with what consequences.

Conclusion

The question comes up 'what is next' and my preliminary answer to that consists of an empirical, a theoretical and a policy-relevant part First, I consider further empirical research on the sub-political character of place-based initiatives as especially relevant in the context of present day attempts to locate democracy elsewhere than in the traditional representative institutions of will-formation only. Providing in-depth analyses of cases in

which local private initiatives come up and try to find their way through the 'jungle' of policies and existing institutional arrangements may give a still more nuanced picture of various manifestations of subpolitics than was given in this paper. Such nuance facilitates to fathom what subpolitics might really mean in terms of its relative openness or closedness, or in terms of the extent to which discursive change goes along with changes of institutional practices or, in other words, institutional malleability, over time and across places. Second, with regard to theoretical development, additional empirical analyses will surely contribute to better and more elaborate place-based accounts of subpolitics. To start, operationalizing the thesis by means of making a distinction between discourse and institutional practices, and between open and closed versions of subpolitics, has shown its relevance. The first distinction shows that the uptake of new ideas in local policy debates and politics often does not go together with a wider debate on the change of institutional practices (over time and across places), meaning that the ideas remain isolated and institutional practices hardly malleable. The second distinction shows that, in order to assess the democratic potential of local initiatives, it is important to articulate what kind of actors make part of the arrangement and which actors don't, with what consequence. Third, for policy makers and practitioners this study has another positive message. Individual citizens, businesses or societal organizations, despite resistances, are well capable to break deadlocks or come to new solutions in engaging ways, not these agents use their discursive abilities to get their ideas accepted. Their innovative potential may well add to the repertoire of policy options if, and this is important, forces for continuity open up to this potential. On the basis of the three cases however, it seems that this is what still needs to be improved to facilitate a new politics that involves groups whose ideas were hitherto excluded from policy making.

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