



Governing structures for airport regions: Learning from the rise and fall of the 'Bestuursforum' in the Schiphol airport region



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ABSTRACT

The spatial and economic impact of airport hubs on their regions has grown in the last decades. As a result, regional planners have started to integrate the governance of airport regions into their core work. The spatial developments around Schiphol Airport have been governed by a joint initiative of local actors for several decades. In this in-depth case study, we use the multi-level perspective from transition studies to draw lessons on the governance of airport regions. Our findings uncovered the rise (1980s–1990s) and the fall (2000s–2010s) of a strong governance structure: the Governance Forum Schiphol (Bestuursforum Schiphol). At its height it was able to navigate through a complex playing field of overlapping and competing governance structures. Its initial strength, the establishment of a real estate development company which enabled the implementation of its regional planning vision, also turned out to be its weakness. In the first decades of its existence, this connection with real estate development made it a central arena to which other emerging governance arrangements, addressing other issues, could connect. In the long run, it prevented the Governance Forum to adjust to changes at the landscape level and other governance arrangements emerged addressing similar issues. Currently, the platform is to be disassembled. The paper draws lessons for and raises questions on the future development of government structures for airport regions.

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1. Introduction

Metropolitan regions around international airports have shown substantial spatial and economic development over the last decades (Appold and Kasarda, 2013). Most of these developments have been spontaneous and haphazard, hard to predict and often neglected by urban and regional planners (Hack, 2000). Weisbrod et al. (1993) even argued that few types of economic development have been as poorly predicted as developments around airports. In order to be attractive for large international investments (Salewski and Dross, 2009; Van Wijk et al., 2011), airport developments are often described as so-called 'white elephants' (De Neufville, 1995); overambitious, supply-oriented planning, often resulting in extremely underutilized grand structures. The planning of airport regions is the poster child of what Rittel and Webber (1973) termed 'wicked problems': problems, difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing

requirements and the absence of unambiguous evaluation criteria. The wickedness of planning airport regions is reflected in these regions that suffer from problems with accessibility, sustainability and liveability.

Recently, planners of metropolitan regions are increasingly confronted with the major challenges of airports to regional planning (Freestone, 2009). At the same time, airport planners are increasingly becoming aware of the metropolitan context (Schaafsma et al., 2008). They recognize the growing reciprocity between airports and the metropolitan environment and acknowledge the need to identify and make use of potential synergies, to be able to compete with other global urban agglomerations (Baker and Mahmood, 2012). Sustainable development of these urban areas is considered a precondition for maintaining a competitive position as an airport and a metropolitan region (Freestone and Baker, 2011).

Capitalizing on the possible synergies and developing sustainable airport regions is easier said than done. It requires deep changes in planning practices and institutions. Planners have been focused in particular on developing conceptual urban models of airports, such as the Airport Region (Freestone and Baker, 2011), the Airport City (Gueller and Gueller, 2002), the Airport Corridor (Schaafsma et al., 2008) and the Aerotropolis (Kasarda and Lindsay,

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2011). However, they mainly focus on the development of an urban model of the airport area and less on the interactions with the surrounding metropolitan environment. In addition, they tend to neglect the institutional organization or the implementation of these models through concrete plans and projects (cf. Alexander, 1998). To better understand the challenges of airport regions and their metropolitan context a broad view of the interwoven patchwork of actors, institutions and resources, which cut across administrative, spatial and temporal scales, is required (Van Buuren et al., 2012).

Even though more airport regions are experimenting with this patchwork, only a few have long-term experience with governance structures in airport regions (Van Wijk, 2007). One of these is the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, established in 1916 (Huys, 2011; De Jong, 2012). Changes at the airport have been planned in direct and complex interaction with the adjacent metropolitan conglomeration. Dierikx and Bouwens (1997) have identified four stages in Schiphol's development: the start (1916–1945); the growth within limits (1945–1967); the rapid development, airport expansion and relocation plans (1967–1985); and 'mainport' as a growth model (1985 to today). Since the 1980s 'mainport' has been an established Dutch portmanteau policy term to advocate the idea that the Dutch national seaport in Rotterdam and Schiphol airport should be in the European top of intercontinental transfer nodes (Van Duinen, 2004:61). Later, it broadened the scope from transportation to economic spin-off to the region, leading to the identification of 'green ports' as another economic-logistic hub to which the mainport strategy was applied. This led to the situation of Schiphol as the poster-child by Kasarda of the 'Airport City that works' – which gave the vision and justification for many airports to adopt a real estate approach to their development (Kasarda and Lindsay, 2011).

In this paper, we describe a study of an important governance arrangement in the Schiphol Airport region, in which many regional planning decisions were prepared. With the experience of the past decades, this airport region provides fertile ground for examining the temporal dynamics behind the emergence and development of such arrangements as well as their consequences. We aim to answer the following research question: *How did the governance structure of the Schiphol Airport region develop over time in relation to its temporal and spatial context and what can we learn from it for the design of governance arrangements aiming to stimulate synergies between airport and metropolitan region?* In the study we focus on the latest development stage, from 1985 up to today. This period, in which Schiphol developed into a mainport is particularly interesting for many other airports that are currently re-examining and redesigning their governance structures to guide the transformation from an airport into an airport city-like model or mainport within a growing metropolitan region.

The paper first develops a deeper understanding of the concept of the airport region and the governance challenges it faces. Then we briefly describe why and how we used transition theory as a conceptual model to look at the changes in governance structures in the Schiphol Airport region. The main body of the paper then maps and describes the development of the Governance Forum Schiphol, which has been the principal regional governance structure for over two decades. In closing we reflect on the lessons learned and examine the implications of our findings on planning practice and future academic research.

2. Governance challenge of airport regions

Both airports and metropolitan regions are struggling to compete with their globally well-connected counterparts—airports that enjoy the status of an international hub and global cities that

offer a cosmopolitan place for international business and the international creative class. The future competitiveness of airports and cities not only depends on economic performance, but also on having favorable conditions that support this competitive edge. Sustainability is another crucial variable, because airport regions tend to have an enormous ecological footprint. The construction, maintenance and daily operation of these regions requires tremendous resources, often at substantial environmental costs (Boschken, 2013). The ecological impact on bustling world cities is particularly evident and widely reported.

Like metropolitan areas face challenges regarding resource use and climate change (Boons et al., 2010; Freestone and Baker, 2011; Janssen-Jansen and Hutton, 2011), airport regions also need to adopt. It is expected that only sustainable airport regions will remain competitive (Freestone and Baker, 2011). There is a vibrant academic, political and professional debate about airside developments and the challenges faced by airport regions (growing numbers of flights that have to be accommodated, noise problems, connections to other important hubs etc.). Schiphol Airport attempted to establish a joint governance structure, including the major airlines, to cope with the airside issues (De Jong, 2012). However, airports can no longer be seen simply as technological artefacts facilitating long-distance air transportation. As the above-mentioned problems show, the serious governance challenges on the landside of airport management also have to be considered.

To meet the landside challenges of airports, visions and strategies for addressing the interlinked airport development and urban development are needed (Hesse, 2013). However, urban development and airport development tend to give rise to conflicts between many competing and often conflicting interests, such as economic growth versus environmental protection. Today, collaborative governance is one of the key approaches for addressing conflicts between diverging interests as well as between the groups of stakeholders that represent these interests (Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos, 2010; Janssen-Jansen and Hutton, 2011; Van Buuren et al., 2012).

3. Combining transition theory and collaborative governance in an analytical framework

In this article, we combine the insights from writings on collaborative governance with transition theory. Collaborative governance has its roots in, amongst others, public administration, public policy and organizational sciences (Ansell and Gash, 2008). It is an empirical theoretical approach emphasizing the need for stakeholder collaboration in situations of interdependent relationships, dispersed power, competing policy goals and therefore few opportunities for hierarchical intervention and control (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). Transition studies also have a strong empirical focus. It was inspired by insights from evolutionary biology and general systems theory which have been applied to studies of (systems of) innovation (Rotmans, Kemp and Van Asselt, 2001). Object of study are long-term developments of socio-technical systems that gradually evolve or more disruptively jump from one equilibrium to another (Geels, 2002). Transition theory focuses on the long-term transition patterns and ways to govern or influence these transitions, often by analyzing in hindsight changes of socio-technical systems and the contributing endogenous and exogenous factors at various system levels and the interaction between these levels (Grin et al., 2010). Collaborative governance focuses more on the present institutional, multi-actor context of decision-making and how actors – which can be a collection of actors from the sphere of public and private decision-making and civil society – fail or achieve to coordinate decision-making, of course by taking

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