

CRONWE

first attempts to institutionalize European spatial planning

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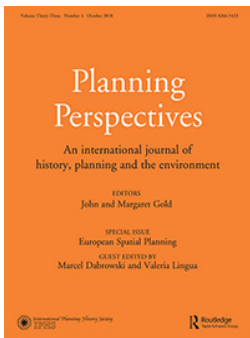
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CRONWE: first attempts to institutionalize European spatial planning

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about a relatively unknown north-west European organization of spatial planning: the (standing) Conference for Spatial Planning in North-Western Europe. The founders of CRONWE tried to create a European spatial planning approach that could influence spatial development in the early years of European integration as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and later the European Economic Community (EEC) were created. Spatial development, as a topic to be addressed, never reached the negotiation tables though, and CRONWE was created as a permanent platform for discussion with the obvious hope that gradually 'Europe' would recognize the relevance and even necessity of European spatial planning. In this paper we use a number of basic concepts of the historical institutionalist approach towards planning research; in particular institutionalization, critical junctures, and path dependency. We apply these concepts to analyse and evaluate the four decades that CRONWE existed. We are particularly interested in assessing why the CRONWE planning agenda remained marginal in the European integration process.

KEYWORDS

Historical institutionalism; CRONWE; North-West Europe; EEC; ECSC; European spatial planning

Introduction

A lot has been written about cooperation between member states of the European Union on spatial development and spatial planning.¹ Roughly speaking there is a history of about 30 years in this area as countries within the European Union of 15 states together with the European Commission – especially the directorate – general for regional policy which today is known as DG Regio – started to cooperate and discuss from the late 1980s onwards.

Far less known and visible in the literature,² is that the creation of the European Economic Community in the 1950s preceded by the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 stimulated national and regional spatial planning organizations in north-west Europe and key people within these organizations to think about cooperation and the necessity of 'European' policies. It was expected that the policies of the new European organizations would have a high spatial impact especially in and around industrial and mining areas.³ Because of this impact the organizations responsible should acquire effective competences to steer such impact in a positive way. The claim for European spatial planning policies and why this claim did not

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¹A key author is Andreas Faludi. See for instance the next footnote.

²An important exception is: Faludi, *Cohesion, Coherence, Cooperation*, 38–40.

³Various contributions in: Permanente Conferentie, *Ruimtelijke ordening onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noord-West Europa*.

materialize is where this paper is about. The focus is on one organization in particular, the Conference for Spatial Planning in North-Western Europe,⁴ which abbreviated became known as CRONWE in Dutch and English (although in the early years there was no participation from the UK as the country was not a member of the newly formed European organizations).⁵ The French acronym is CRENO – Conférence des Régions de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest – and the German KRENWE: Konferenz für Regionalentwicklung in Nordwesteuropa. These different names already suggest that the nouns in the middle of these different names – Régions; Regionalentwicklung; Ruimtelijke Ordening in Dutch – have a different meaning. Here we abstain from explaining these differences as this returns below.

The history of CRONWE started roughly in the mid 1950s and came to an end around 1995. What this paper seeks to do is go beyond a mere narrative level as this paper is inspired by the plea of Andre Sorensen in this journal for an historical institutionalist (HI) approach towards (urban) planning history.⁶

This approach is centred on a few key concepts, drawing inspiration from a number of sources, which in some cases are somewhat re-interpreted in order to be applicable to planning history. The first concept is about institutions themselves. In general these can be defined as shared norms and formal rules that shape action in social, political, and economic processes.⁷ Sorensen rightfully argues that the precise definition depends on the object of study. However, he also argues that HI should depart from a restrictive definition 'to compare the development and application of particular urban policies and processes in different cities and contexts.'⁸

The object of this paper is not planning or urban policies but *pleas* that European organizations should be active in the field of spatial planning. The interest lies in the ideas about the content of the advocated kind of planning. As we will see these ideas are strongly related to perceptions of the spatial structure of (north-west) Europe. These perceptions are expressed in metaphors but also – very typical of spatial planning irrespective of a particular (national) tradition of planning – in visualizations and cartographies. We are also interested in the nature of the proposed planning interventions, which are connected to the understandings of spatial structure and the competences of (European) planning organizations that should make such interventions possible.

A second key concept of HI this paper seeks to apply is path dependency: 'once established, some institutions tend to become increasingly difficult to change over time.'⁹ The original idea of path dependency stems from economic research: certain companies or sectors witness increasing returns thanks to learning and coordination effects.¹⁰ The mechanism that plays a role here is known as positive feedback effects. Transferred to policy such effects take place for instance when a particular kind of policy

[...] helps to generate a political coalition that works towards the continuation of the policy [...] Where positive feedback exists, each step down a particular pathway increases the likelihood of further steps along the same pathway, and increases the cost of reverting to some previously available option.¹¹

⁴In this paper Conference with a capital C refers to the organisation, while conference without a capital refers conference as an event.

⁵Around the mid 1960s Conferentie (in Dutch) was briefly written with a K, so CRONWE became KRONWE.

⁶Sorensen, "Taking path dependence seriously."

⁷Ibid., 18.

⁸Ibid., 20.

⁹Ibid., 21.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

This paper is not so much about planning policy in practice but about an organization of whose members were based in national practices and were trying to convince key European players to become active in the domain of spatial development and spatial planning. This could imply that – for instance – positive feedback effects may have a distinct characteristic and this is indeed what we found.

Critical junctures is the third concept this paper seeks to apply. Very briefly these are ‘those moments of major change when new institutions are established.’¹² Such critical junctures emerge ‘when old policies and understandings now longer work, and new institutions need to be found.’¹³ As we apply the HI approach in a context where spatial planning is advocated but non-existent the critical juncture discussed here is of a very particular nature.

The above three HI concepts are the main concepts we seek to apply in this paper. As this paper is (to put it bluntly) about a non-existent policy area – spatial planning undertaken by European organizations, in particular those related to the European Economic Community of the 1950s and 1960s – the concept of incremental and endogenous change is less relevant as the EEC (EC/European Community from 1993 onward and EU/European Union from 2009) never acquired the competence to be active in the field of spatial planning.

The questions this paper seeks to answer are twofold. First what were the reasons for the creation of CRONWE? Second, why did its main claim not become reality: European integration has major spatial implications and these implications are in need of explicit policies? The objectives of this paper are similarly twofold. On an empirical level this paper seeks to shed light on a relatively lesser known ‘chapter’ in the history of European spatial planning. We draw evidence from an analysis of secondary literature and direct experience with CRONWE by attending some of its conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the exception of the early years of CRONWE the organization tried to publish proceedings after each conference. Part of the history of CRONWE was also traced through the annual reports of the Dutch National Physical Planning Agency¹⁴ as from the beginning of this agency – the early 1940s – up to the 1980s, these reports contained an international chapter which often included a section on CRONWE. To the best of the author’s knowledge, similar material is not available in other countries that participated in CRONWE.

On a theoretical and methodological level, this paper seeks to apply the framework provided by historical institutionalism to explain why CRONWE emerged and – more importantly – why this organization faded away into oblivion.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section gives a brief account of spatial planning on the national level in particular in the country which played a key role in the creation of CRONWE: The Netherlands. The setting is formed by the 1950s. The third section analyses the creation of CRONWE. Again the setting is formed by the 1950s but the geographical scale is now clearly (north-west) European. The fourth section discusses how the (north-west) European spatial structure was interpreted within CRONWE and what this could (‘should’ according to CRONWE members) imply for spatial planning. We are now in the 1960s. This is also the setting for the fifth section but the focus is now almost exclusively on a main argumentative tool applied in CRONWE namely visualization through maps. The sixth section discusses the final years of CRONWE: not a sudden

¹²*ibid.*, 25.

¹³*ibid.*

¹⁴Up to end of the 1980s this was the official translation of Rijksplanologische Dienst into English. In later years ‘physical’ became ‘spatial’.

‘death’ but a gradual process of sinking into oblivion. The final section returns to the main analytical concepts presented above.

National spatial planning makes headway

How can the leaders of the State Office of the National Plan (RNP: *Rijksdienst voor het Nationale Plan*) speak of European planning when a national, Dutch physical planning tradition hasn’t even been established? This fatal question was put to the director of the RNP in 1951, at a moment in time when this director wished more to persuade his minister to use his influence to put spatial planning on the European negotiations agenda.

In the course of the 1950s, however, the tide began to turn for Dutch national planning. Preceded by a 1958 advisory report entitled ‘The Development of the West of the Country’¹⁵, in 1960 the ‘Memorandum on Physical Planning in the Netherlands’ was issued. Later renamed the ‘First Memorandum’, this policy paper was in itself an acknowledgement that physical planning constituted a ‘national issue’.¹⁶ The memorandum could thus be seen as a successful attempt to link spatial planning issues with a number of interests that played key roles in other policy areas. National spatial planning had literally been put on the map. From a historical institutionalist perspective the 1950s and early 1960s could be seen as a critical juncture regarding Dutch national planning. Several interconnected contextual issues were regarded as too complex and too critical to be dealt with by the planning tools in the hand of municipalities and provinces. For example, massive migration from peripheral areas to the west of the country, uncontrolled urbanization and suburbanization, the loss of valuable agricultural land and open space, and pressure on land needed to connect major ports and industrial complexes to the sea. Spatial planning objectives were connected with economic objectives – industrialization – as well as agricultural policies and housing. National government saw a clear role for itself to combat the massive post-war housing shortage and spatial planning was expected to provide ample opportunities for housing on the right sort of locations.

Although the First Memorandum was no model of decisiveness – for instance, it failed to include designations for ‘new towns’ (later centres of growth) or new port areas – from 1960 onwards it was possible to speak of a truly national spatial planning policy. Even a planning doctrine according to Faludi and Van der Valk: an intricate and highly institutionalized complex of spatial planning concepts about the desired morphology of the country including plans and strategies, as well organizational structures and financial tools for implementation.¹⁷ Thus a bridgehead emerged at home – that is, in the Netherlands – from which other European countries could be coaxed into cooperating on spatial development issues. The government saw plenty of reasons to do this as it reported in the 1960 memorandum. After all, a large, interconnected urban complex was emerging in North-Western Europe: 40% of Europe’s population, a total of 150 million people, were living within a 600-km radius of the Rhine estuary. Moreover, there was a high probability that this heavily urbanized area would develop in a way similar to the Boston–Washington (‘BosWash’) region, namely as a single, cohesive urban entity covering many hundreds of kilometres. The memorandum did not use the term ‘megapolis’ – this concept only took hold after the publication of Jean Gottmann’s celebrated 1961 work on the Atlantic Seaboard – although back in 1957 a case was already being made in

¹⁵The Dutch title is: *De Ontwikkeling van het Westen des Lands* (Rijksdienst voor het Nationale Plan; Werkcommissie Westen des Lands, De Ontwikkeling van het Westen des Lands: Rapport).

¹⁶Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting en Bouwnijverheid, *Nota inzake de ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland*, 32. Translation author.

¹⁷Faludi and Van der Valk, *Rule and Order*.

the Netherlands for seeing the ‘Western-European megalopolis’ as the broadest framework for Dutch urban development.¹⁸

However, as the First Memorandum implied the ‘level of uncertainty’ still remained too high for European cooperation.¹⁹ This somewhat cryptic statement can be traced back to the failed attempt to slip spatial planning into the EC Treaty of 1957. Despite this fiasco, or rather because of it, a tentative form of cooperation began to take shape at the North-Western European level between representatives of policy institutions and academics. At its heart lay the future development of the European Megalopolis – written with a capital ‘M’, following Gottmann’s example in the American case. The Netherlands, and indeed the RNP, participated actively in this process. In particular, RNP director-general Jasper Vink threw his full weight into the scale. It deserves mentioning that the European Megalopolis was not always conceived on the scale of North-Western Europe. In the budget for 1960, Vink’s own department referred to the ‘industrially highly-developed central block’ of the EEC, stretching from the Rhine delta to Northern Italy.²⁰ In the 1966 Second Memorandum, this structure was renamed ‘central axis’ of Europe, extending in a north-westerly direction up to Birmingham and Liverpool.²¹

A standing conference instead of a European ‘body’

Over the years, the ‘MHAL region’ (the Maastricht/Heerlen-Hasselt/Genk-Aachen-Liège region) is cited as a prime example of cross-border cooperation²², especially because it involves three countries. Few will be aware, however, that before the war, on a more modest scale, frequent contact had already been established between representatives of the MAL (Maastricht-Aachen-Liège) cities, entrepreneurs and chambers of commerce.²³ The founding of the ECSC in 1951 ensured a new breath of life into the idea of an interconnected region that had many issues in common, but now the scale increased to include a large part of Northern Europe. Heavy industry, mineral extraction and rapid, often chaotic urbanization characterized the region lying roughly between Lille, Strasbourg and Hannover. The notion of a professional organization that would be permanently dedicated to the region’s development was realised during a colloquium held in 1955 in the geographical heart of the ECSC region, Liège. At this colloquium, representatives of regions in France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany and the Netherlands took the decision to establish a non-governmental organization, the so-called ‘Standing Conference for the Spatial Development of the Regions of North-Western Europe’. Planners were somewhat struggling with the question how to approach the geographically fragmented nature of a Europe that was moving towards integration in the 1950s. Thinking in geographical terms, rather than political entities, preference was given to a spatially contiguous region. Italy, despite belonging to the ECSC, lay completely outside the Standing Conference’s working area.

Immediately after the colloquium in Liège, it was clear that a new path was opened in terms of European integration. One month after the colloquium, for example, the Messina Conference took place.²⁴ However, it gradually became clear, that the spatial development of European territory

¹⁸Van den Berg, “Algemene inleiding,” 13. Translation author.

¹⁹Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting en Bouwnijverheid, *Nota inzake de ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland*, 12. Translation author.

²⁰TK 6900 nr.2 – Rijksbegroting voor het dienstjaar 1960, Hoofdstuk IX A: Volkshuisvesting en bouwnijverheid, *Memorie van toelichting*, 6.

²¹Minister van Volkshuisvesting en Ruimtelijke Ordening, *Tweede nota over de ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland*.

²²See for instance: Scott, “Transboundary cooperation on Germany’s Borders.”

²³Van Gorcum, *Ruimtelijke ordening, onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noordwest-Europa*.

²⁴In June 1955 the Foreign Ministers of the six countries forming the European Coal and Steel Community met here and adopted a proposal from the three Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) for further economic integration. See for instance Nugent, *The government and politics of the European Union*.

would be a political non-issue in the discussions on what would later become the Treaty of the European Community. The formal establishment of the European Community obviously did not form the critical juncture spatial planners were hoping for. Nevertheless, the North-Western European planning community did not lose heart. A small group of planners, including representatives from the RNP, prepared a follow-up to the Liège colloquium. In July 1958, when the EEC had been operative for six months, a large-scale, four-day meeting was held, again in Liège. The participants included not only 200 ‘specialists’ from the three Benelux countries as well as France and Germany, but also representatives from various European organizations, a clear indication that initiators of the meeting were setting their hopes on incremental institutional change: the obvious expectation was that European representatives would take back home the idea of a much-needed spatial planning project on a transnational scale.

The theme of the congress was ‘Spatial planning: part of the development of North-Western Europe’, bearing testimony to the belief that it would be impossible to separate the ‘spatial’ aspect from the overall *Werdegang* of Europe. With some pride, the foreword to the conference proceedings asserted that many held this position:

It [the Standing Conference] is delighted that its efforts have been followed with so much interest by the highest authorities and in all ranks of society: universities, politics, government bodies, economists, trade unions, and so forth, all of which believe in our Continent’s mission.²⁵

It should thus come as no surprise that the colloquium saw the adoption of a final resolution that called upon the ‘European organs’ to support the mission of the Standing Conference, a body ‘entirely dedicated to the regions of the North West in a united and harmoniously developed Europe’.²⁶

When reflecting on the conference, the RNP’s representative, Van Gorcum, drew some profound conclusions.²⁷ He raised the problem of the major differences existing between different planning traditions. Spatial planning Dutch-style, he argued, concerned arrangements for the use and division of land. The French *aménagement du territoire* was more comprehensive, because it related to social and economic development and, in particular, its spatial aspects: the distribution of development opportunities across the national territory. According to Van Gorcum, the Belgian tradition could be characterized more as *urbanism* or urban planning, whereas the German concepts of *Raumplanung* and *Raumordnung* reflected yet another orientation.²⁸ Nevertheless, the aim was to develop a common policy in the Conference’s region, argued Van Gorcum.

Surely it is a fallacy to believe in the possibility of eliminating all these differences in the short term. But that is no reason why we should abandon cooperation. After all, also in relation to spatial development, people must be prepared to pursue common politics and will thus need to establish broad outlines to this end. We therefore believe ... that the issues should first be approached generically rather than on a sectoral basis. And it seems that it is precisely the responsibility of the international organs, and especially those that are able to act in coordinated fashion, such as the Council of Europe, for example, to advance such a thing.²⁹

²⁵Permanente Conferentie, *Ruimtelijke ordening onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noord-West Europa*, III. Translation author.

²⁶Ibid. Translation author.

²⁷Van Gorcum, *Ruimtelijke ordening, onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noordwest-Europa*.

²⁸It should be noted that these categories are similar to concepts used in the ‘Compendium of planning systems’ published by the European Commission around forty years later (1997).

²⁹Van Gorcum, *Ruimtelijke ordening, onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noordwest-Europa*, 14. Translation author.

Another body, besides the EEC, was thereby identified that had to apply itself to the worthy cause: namely, that of European spatial planning. It is this core idea that can be regarded as a genuine institution as put forward in the introductory section. Obviously at the same time differences in (institutionalized) national traditions were downplayed.

More or less pre-empting the emergence of an international ‘organ’ as a spatial planning entity, the attendees of the colloquium decided to strengthen the level of cohesion within their own ranks. The Standing Conference had to develop a more solid basis by transforming itself into an international association with a scientific mission, with representatives of countries and regions, in principle, as its members. On 13 March 1959, once more in Liège, Vink and the other heads of official services working in the area of spatial planning founded the ‘Conference for Spatial Planning in North-Western Europe’ (in the introduction we already discussed the names of the standing conference in other languages).

Its objective is to contribute, by means of targeted studies and activities, to the harmonious development of the regions of North-Western Europe, forming part of Western Germany, Belgium, France, the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg and the Netherlands, *in the context of the demands of European unification*.³⁰

The last part of this objective indicates that the founders saw their own organization as a kind of substitute for a ‘real’ European planning entity. The fact that the founders of CRONWE identified a link between their own organization and the European integration process was also the reason why Great Britain was not included in the sphere of action, even though people like Vink saw ‘both sides of the North Sea’ as a contiguous space.³¹ Nevertheless, South East England was featured in quite a few CRONWE maps. At a much later stage, representatives from South East England did ultimately join CRONWE, but only after the United Kingdom had become a member of the European Community.

With the establishment of CRONWE, the founders agreed that the costs would be shared by the participating planning services. The distribution formula was a simple one: one third would be paid by Germany (principally North Rhine-Westphalia), one third by France, and the remainder by the Benelux countries, with the Dutch RNP as the largest contributor. In principle, the representatives of the countries and regions would also sit on the various CRONWE bodies. In other words, the chosen formula was very similar, to that of the liaison centre for planning services, which the RNP had pressed so strongly for in the early years of the creation of the European Economic Community. The pathway – to use one of the key words of the historical institutionalist approach – did not become a main stream in the context of the EEC though.

The European megalopolis

Although CRONWE was not formally affiliated with the EEC in any way, its intentions and activities, certainly until the mid-1960s, clearly reflected this substitute role. For example, it is notable how much the organization invested in undertaking studies on the spatial structure of North-Western Europe,³² something that would have been done by a European planning service had there been one. A striking feature was the numerous maps – rather basic maps, in fact – that were developed on the distribution of the population, urbanization, infrastructure, traffic flows, and such. In the early years of CRONWE, many of these maps were drafted by Istvan Kormoss, who was, for decades

³⁰Article 1 of the statutes. Translation author; italics added.

³¹Vink, “Het fysiek milieu en de interregionale ontwikkeling.” Translation author.

³²Klerkx, *Plannen met Europa*, 118.

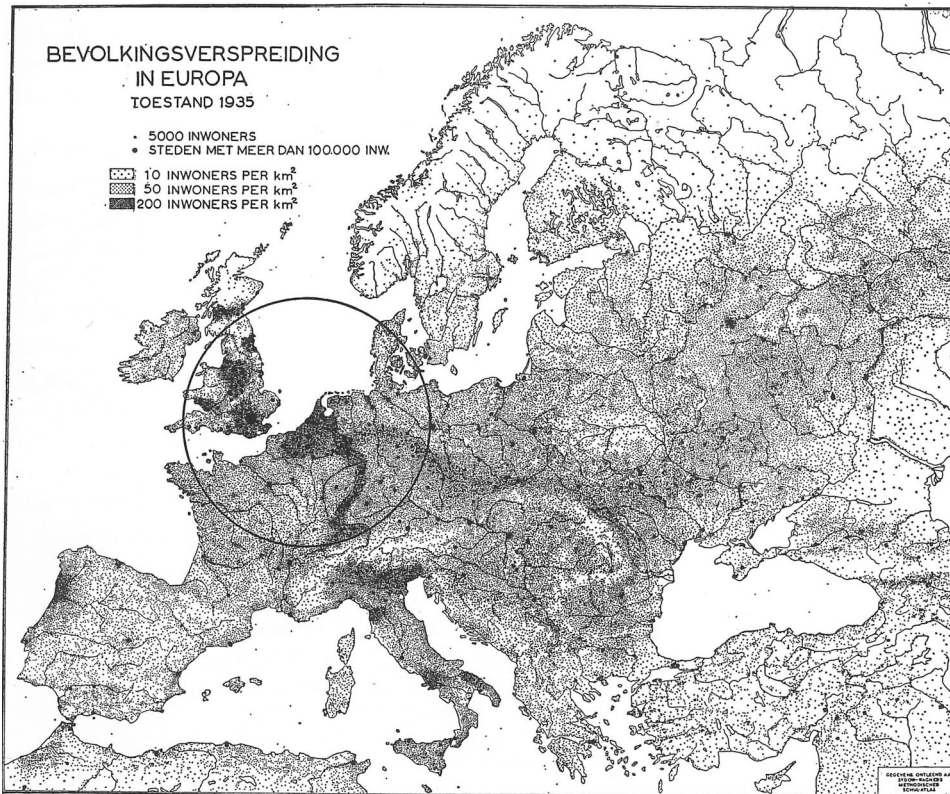


Figure 1. Example of the application of the so called Kormoss map on the distribution of population across Europe. Source: Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting en Bouwnijverheid, 1960.

one of the key figures in CRONWE, particularly in his role as secretary general. As a professor at the College of Europe in Bruges, which had been founded by the European Movement, he was one of the many ‘Europeans’ who would remain active in CRONWE for many years. One of the CRONWE maps is even known as the Kormoss map, a map showing the distribution of population and urban agglomerations across the European continent. It was updated a number of times and appeared in all sorts of documents and reports as it was about the first of its kind (See Figure 1). Kormoss was also one of the three compilers of the ‘Orbis terrarum Europæ’ published by the College of Europe in 1955: a collection of dozens of artistic, cultural and economic maps. It is currently available at only a few places across the globe, amongst them the ‘Historical Archives of the European Union’, which also has a rather large CRONWE archive handed over by Kormoss himself in 2011.³³

This atlas reveals what the European planners, united in CRONWE, were striving for; namely, European unity on paper. In the words of H. Brugmans, then rector of the College of Europe:

We want to unite Europe – and quickly – but we are not sufficiently familiar with it. At primary school, when we all believed what our teachers told us, we always had a map of our own country in front of us, and when this was joined by a map of Europe, it was made up of states of different colours, all sharply

³³See <http://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/99620?item=CRNO> (accessed 22 October 2017).

delineated ... There is thus a need for a different kind of cartography, for reasons of a pedagogical and civic nature.³⁴

Brugmans also addressed those who were working specifically on European integration: 'Technicians who are working on unification also need cartographical material ... Europe will only appear when people want to represent it as a whole.'³⁵ The spatial planner as cartographer – a title that was well suited to someone like Kormoss – thereby had a dual ambition. The focus should not only be on capturing spatial reality in cartographical symbols, but also on blurring the national borders drawn on the mental maps of everyone working on the future of Europe, clearly an example of incremental institutional changes rather difficult to trace as the original imprint might have been lost in the memory of people. Obviously processes of institutionalization in spatial planning are not only expressed through a specific vocabulary but also through specific *cartographic* languages which include – as we will see – the edges of a map: the perimeters of the territory.³⁶

In 1958, the vision on the CRONWE region still remained quite rudimentary. In his keynote speech to the Liège conference, Vink got closest to offering a structural image. He showed a zoning plan of the physical environment of the CRONWE region, through which one could just make out a vision of the urban structure. In fact, he characterized the contiguous region of the Ardennes, Eiffel, Hunsrück, Taunus, Sauerland and Westerwald as the 'green heart' around which, evidently, the urban body was situated.³⁷ Vink clearly wanted to repeat the brilliant move with which he had provided Dutch planning with: an appealing metaphor. In fact: institutionalized perceptions of territory and space in general are strongly based on metaphors.³⁸

Vink's colleague Van Gorcum, who was actively involved in organizing the conference and was even secretary of the Benelux commission for spatial planning founded in 1952, sharpened the contours of his director's structural image, which was still comparatively implicit. He situated the 'green heart' at the centre of what would later be known in CRONWE circles as the 'urban triangle': the three large 'urban agglomerations' of the Western Netherlands, the Ruhr region and the 'Belgian urban region' (see [Figure 2](#)).³⁹ He made a comparison with Gottmann's megalopolis, with the qualification that there was, on average, a much higher population density in the North-Western European Megalopolis than on the Atlantic Seaboard. In the North American megalopolis, Gottmann included areas with a density that, at least according to Van Gorcum, could only be found in Europe in countries such as Norway or Sweden. Van Gorcum set the threshold value more than ten times higher, which produced a megalopolis that was 'already large enough' to his taste.⁴⁰ The planning tasks that he ultimately formulated for this region were inferred directly from the report entitled 'The Development of the West of the Country', which was published by the Dutch RNP in 1958. Thus 'uncontrolled construction' should be suppressed, large nature reserves should be safeguarded from 'decay' and recreation areas should be preserved as large parks or 'fields'. In short, the North-Western European megalopolis was a segmented metropolis on multiple levels of scale.⁴¹

³⁴Brugmans in: Klerkx, 75. Original in Dutch; translation author.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Similar conclusions are also reached by: Faludi, "Framing with images"; Dühr, *The visual language of spatial planning*. See also: Zonneveld, "Multiple visioning"; Corner, "The Agency of Mapping."

³⁷Vink, "Het fysiek milieu en de interregionale ontwikkeling," 3.

³⁸See for instance: Mehmood, "On the History and Potentials of Evolutionary Metaphors in Urban Planning."

³⁹Van Gorcum, *Ruimtelijke ordening, onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van Noordwest-Europa*, 11.

⁴⁰Ibid., 12.

⁴¹Ibid. Translation of the concepts between quotation marks by author.

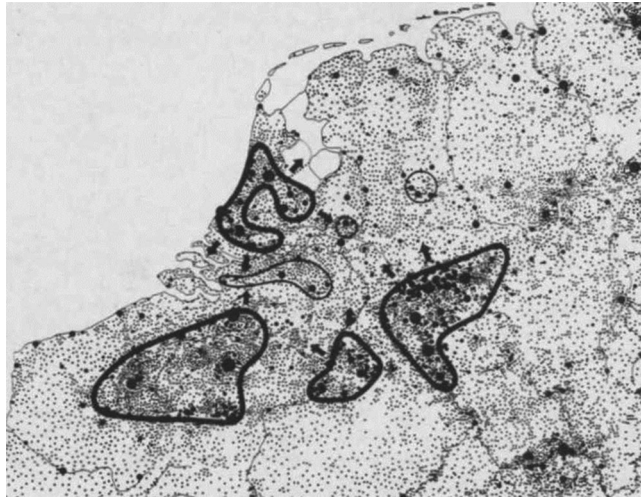


Figure 2. The 'urban triangle' in north-west Europe. Source: Rijksdienst voor het Nationale Plan, 1960.

The participants of the 1958 colloquium attempted to define the CRONWE region as a single entity in relation to other themes too, although not always with equal success. Evidently, a single colloquium could not change peoples mental maps. For example, participants reflected in depth on the traffic grid within the CRONWE region, but it was mainly representatives of individual sub-regions who spoke up, presenting all kinds of wish-lists for new cross-border links.⁴² The major rivers received a particular degree of attention. There was a plea for international cooperation, which should focus on both the quality and the quantity of water. It was even suggested that an international public body, a water board, should be founded for the Rhine and Meuse rivers.⁴³

Despite the various orientations of the planning systems in the CRONWE region, the urban development of North-Western Europe gradually came to assume a more central role in the Conferences work. The concept of a megalopolis slowly came to the fore, certainly after the publication of the 1961 eponymous book by Gottmann created a wider familiarity with the concept. An impression – Vink's urban triangle, in fact – was included in the RNP's annual report for 1961 (see Figure 2). Positions on the North-Western European megalopolis were ambivalent though. On the one hand, there was a certain pride that Europe boasted an urban complex of an economic and demographic significance comparable to that of the Atlantic Seaboard. This type of sentiment was associated with people such as the geographer and planner quoted above, G.J. van den Berg. Others were worried about the size of urban agglomerations and their tendencies to grow, spread out and merge.

After Vink had been appointed chairman in 1965, the organization changed its course. Its main mission became about organizing public debate on the spatial structure of Europe, North-Western Europe in particular. The focus became more one of stimulating the development of a broad (North-Western) European professional community than fulfilling the role of a substitute planning institution from which positive feedback loops could emerge in the direction of the institutions of the EEC and – secondly – the Council of Europe. Conferences were held about every two years on

⁴²*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³In fact the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) was created as early as 1950. However, it lacked the competences of, for instance; the Dutch water boards. See: Zonneveld and Wandl, "The rise of a new territorial governance domain."

average, a frequency that was maintained until the disbanding of CRONWE in the late 1990s. These conferences were almost invariably paired with a publication some time later. Representatives from the European organizations were invited to participate, certainly in the first conferences. For example, in 1966, two members of the High Authority of the ECSC were asked to provide an introduction to the conference, with the theme of the ‘planning aspects’ of converting mining regions.

One year later, a spatial scale-leap was made with the next conference, which broadly addressed the spatial development of the entire European megalopolis.⁴⁴ For this conference, the European Commission was asked to participate in the organization. The Commission made its buildings available to host the conference, and also provided one of the introductions. As the chair of CRONWE, Vink himself opened the conference and immediately raised the concept of the megalopolis:

[...] that large urban triangle with around 35 million residents which is emerging in and around the delta region of the mouths of the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt, with its vertices being Holland’s Randstad, the Rhine-Ruhr region in Germany and the large agglomerations in Belgium-Northern France: the largest urban complex on the entire European continent, and certainly one of the largest in the whole world.⁴⁵

But, as Vink went on, the problems of the European Megalopolis were different from those of its North American counterpart. Its spatial structure was not linear, as opposed to the Atlantic Seaboard, but shaped like a triangle, which meant that it was more likely to fill up, as Vink suggested in an argument that bore striking similarities to the notion of the (Dutch) Randstad and the Green Heart. The only structural difference was that the European Randstad had only three vertices, whereas the Dutch Randstad had four.

In essence, however, Vink was telling a European audience the same story that had been told in the Netherlands, at least in relation to urban morphology. Another difference between the European Megalopolis and the Atlantic Seaboard was that the former was spread across five nation states, with three different languages. Vink concluded his opening speech to the congress by inviting the European Commission to start working with CRONWE to address the problems affecting the region under study. The Commission representative who spoke after Vink, however, described a rather different problem. He contrasted the expansion of ‘core areas’ and harbour zones with falling levels of development in old industrial areas.⁴⁶ Whereas Vink was concerned with the spatial quality of the ‘urban triangle’, when it came to spatial development, the Commission spokesman was primarily interested in the social and economic cohesion within the CRONWE territory, as well as the coordination of national infrastructure plans, the subject of another lecture by a Commission representative. In short, the room for action that the Commission saw for itself in North-Western Europe was determined by the opportunities offered by the EC Treaty, and was closer to what Van Gorcum had described, a few years beforehand, as the French tradition of *aménagement du territoire*.

European cartographies

Seen against the historical background to the Conference, it is clear that the members of CRONWE wanted the European Community to change direction. It is evident that most CRONWE members and adherents failed to understand the nature of European cooperation based on the EEC treaties: focusing on urban morphology is basically about zoning and land-use, for which these treaties did

⁴⁴Konferentie voor Ruimtelijke Ontwikkeling in Noord-West Europa, *Studiedag 'Ruimtelijke Ordening in het gebied van Rijn, Maas en Schelde'*.

⁴⁵Vink, “Het fysiek milieu en de interregionale ontwikkeling,” 11. Translation author.

⁴⁶Pinchemel, “Economische structuren en interregionale ruimteordening.”

not contain any provision. One clear exponent of this crucial point in the CRONWE ‘programme’ was the *Landesplaner* – state planner – Norbert Ley, who, as the director of spatial planning in North Rhine-Westphalia, was one of the founders of CRONWE. In his view, there should not only be effective coordination between European policies in the areas of social and economic development, energy politics and infrastructure. In addition, a one-sided economic orientation should be superseded by a much broader approach, namely that of spatial planning:

The limitation to just economic aspects is not sufficient. The life of human beings is [...] determined and influenced by many other factors. [...] Economic planning must be positioned in a spatial planning approach at the European level and urgently at the North-west European scale.⁴⁷

Ley’s introduction during the CRONWE conference was accompanied by the motto ‘Raumordnung in Nordwesteuropa als übergeordnete Aufgabe’ or: ‘Spatial planning in north-west Europe as an overarching task’.⁴⁸ In order to ground his argument, Ley presented an elaborate structural image of North-Western Europe (see [Figure 3](#)). The *Delta-Raum* (Delta Area) was composed of a number of large urban and economic densification areas, sharply bordered by green belts. Open spaces (*Freiräume*) were situated within easy reach of these densification areas. The most striking features in Ley’s map, at least in the original colour version, were the large-scale Erholungsgebiete or recreational areas, in which Vink’s North-Western European ‘Green Heart’ was easily recognisable.

Another spatial structure map was also presented at the CRONWE conference, entitled ‘The Netherlands in its wider surroundings.’ This was included in the maps appendix to the Dutch Second Memorandum on Spatial Planning of 1966. There were notable similarities with the map from North Rhine-Westphalia, this may have been a result of the discussions that the institution, the National Physical Planning Agency (RPD: *Rijksplanologische Dienst*), had engaged in with planning services in Belgium and neighbouring federal states in Germany.⁴⁹ There was one striking difference, however: the area of North-Western Europe delimited on the German map had a strong continental focus, whereas the RPD map had a maritime orientation (see [Figure 4](#)). The ‘delta’ quality of North-Western Europe was brought out much more emphatically by the RPD than on the German map – which is hardly surprising in light of the fact that the delta had been a key element in Dutch spatial and spatial-economic policy ever since the publication in 1958 of the report entitled ‘The Development of the West of the Country’ as previously discussed.⁵⁰ These two maps are excellent examples of efforts to institutionalize certain perceptions of territories through cartographies as discussed above.

Vink concluded the 1967 CRONWE conference with a call to start working on an ‘all embracing conception’ for the ‘complex of cities’ situated in the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt region. The structural images from the Netherlands and Germany were evidently too nationally oriented to be able to fulfil this role. Regarding the function of a North-Western European structural image, Vink himself was ambivalent. In his concluding speech he spoke about implementation, not an unusual planning principle at the time in relation to map images.⁵¹

⁴⁷Ley, “Die Zukunft der Raumordnung in Nordwesteuropa,” 157, translation author. Original text: ‘Die Beschränkung auf rein wirtschaftliche Aspekte ist jedoch nicht ausreichend. Das Leben des Menschen wird ... von viel mehr Faktoren bestimmt und beeinflusst als nur von wirtschaftlichen. ... Die ökonomische Planung muss daher in eine umfassende Raumplanung Europas und vordringlich Nordwesteuropas einbezogen werden.’

⁴⁸Ley, “Raumordnung in Nordwesteuropa als übergeordnete Aufgabe.”

⁴⁹When a new Spatial Planning Act became effective in 1965, the RNP became the National Physical Planning Agency, in Dutch: Rijksplanologische Dienst (RPD).

⁵⁰Witsen, “Ruimtelijke ordening in Noordwest-Europa”; Witsen, “Physical planning in North-West Europe.”

⁵¹Konferentie voor Ruimtelijke Ontwikkeling in Noord-West Europa, *Studiedag “Ruimtelijke Ordening in het gebied van Rijn, Maas en Schelde*, 115.

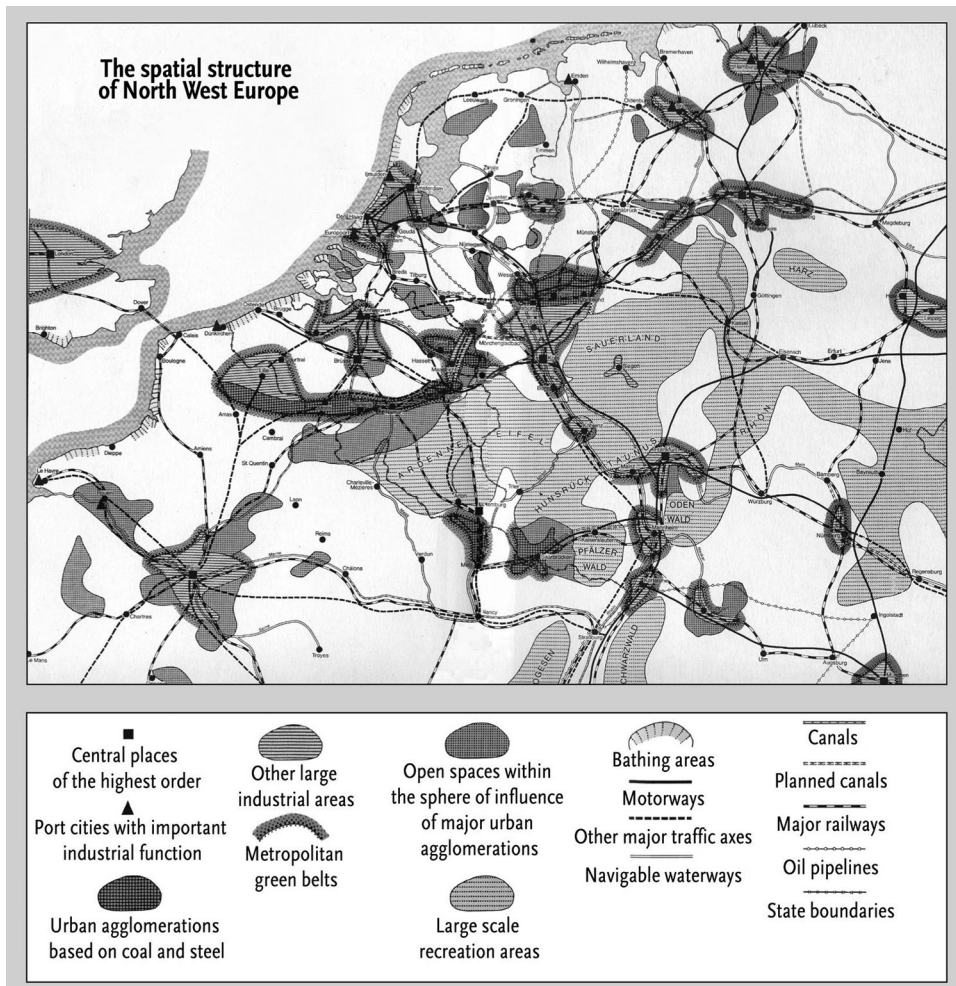


Figure 3. The vision of the urban morphology of north-west Europe of the German planner Norbert Ley; translation key by author. Source: Ley, 1967 (original in colour).

Implementation could be achieved by involving national governments, but also through European organizations, notably the Commission itself. In any case, a special working group would energetically get to work with the aim to present the required integral ‘conception’ at the next conference, to be held the following year. This working group was composed of the leaders of the official planning services that participated in CRONWE. In the end, this was a one-off event that was never repeated (as we will see this may be explained by the fact that in later years CRONWE was to become eclipsed by other organizations). Theo Quené, the new director-general took office in 1967, and represented the RPD. Vink himself was responsible for the presentation of what was officially known as the spatial structural sketch for the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt urban triangle.⁵²

Vink linked the 1968 structural sketch for the urban triangle to a somewhat different planning principle from that which he had highlighted in 1967. Naturally, the sketch could not:

⁵²Vink, *Toelichting bij de ruimtelijke structuurschets voor de stedelijke driehoek Rijn-Maas-Schelde*.

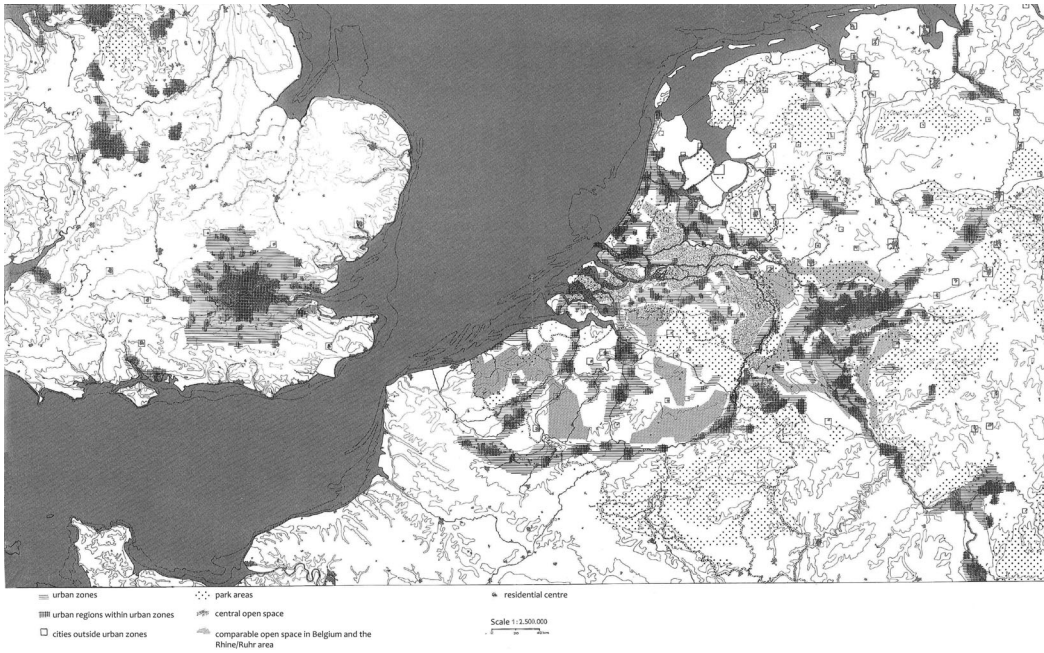


Figure 4. A somewhat competing image of the urban morphology of north-west Europe; translation key by author. Source: Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting en Ruimtelijke Ordening, Tweede nota over de ruimtelijke ordening: Verkorte Uitgave, 1966.

... have an official character. The map [...] should therefore certainly not be seen as some kind of international spatial plan. But it should contribute to the much-needed international thought process, also within the circle of agencies that are officially responsible for this. What it should primarily do is show an image of the total structure that has been devised, and not one of national fragments. For if one thing is becoming more and more clear, it is this: that in the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt region, we are seeing the irresistible growth of a coherent urban and industrial complex on a global scale that transcends the borders of our five countries, creating a new hierarchy in the spatial pattern that is no longer determined by nations alone.⁵³

Vink did not fail to mention that the sketch came from the RPD. CRONWE had so few financial resources that it was not possible to outsource the drawing of the sketch. It therefore related to exactly the same segment of North-Western Europe as was shown on the map in the Second Memorandum. Once again, Hamburg, Mannheim, Le Havre and Liverpool were the vertices of the structural image. According to Vink, the North Sea did not constitute a border, either; on the contrary, it was a focus of activity, a centre point for the complex of urban concentrations situated around it.⁵⁴

Thus in Vink's view, the CRONWE region was primarily a North Sea region, and not a continental one – a position he had also taken earlier, as we saw above. According to Vink, quality of life, not prosperity, posed the greatest spatial problem in the CRONWE region; for, if anything, there was too much, rather than too little, of the latter. The issue of quality of life was subsequently developed in a manner strongly reminiscent of the Dutch 1966 Second Memorandum. Urbanisation should be concentrated to a 'reasonable degree', and there should be a 'high degree of variation'.⁵⁵ This meant that

⁵³Ibid., 1. Translation author.

⁵⁴Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6. Translation of the concepts between quotation marks by author.

‘increasingly massive urban complexes’ should be alternated with ‘open spaces of at least an equal size’.⁵⁶ There should also be differentiation within the built-up area itself, especially in terms of living environments. In short, Vink applied key concepts from the Dutch Second Memorandum to North-Western Europe.

CRONWE becomes redundant

The structural sketch discussed in the previous section – in fact, the entire period between 1965 and 1968, when Vink was the chair of CRONWE – formed a highpoint in the history of CRONWE. As such, the organization could be characterized as a clearing house: a platform for the exchange of information, documentation, maps, ideas and plans.⁵⁷ The obvious hope was that in this way European institutions would gradually accept the storylines discussed over and over at CRONWE gatherings and in this way lead to incremental institutional change.

In the following years, roughly from the 1970s onward, the fervour gradually died down. In the first decade of its existence, CRONWE had been supported by the heads of planning services in the CRONWE region, the people who had also set up the Conference. Yet they stepped back at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s.⁵⁸ They were all enthusiastic Europeans, to a greater or lesser extent, but this was less true of their successors. Quené, who was the director of the RPD for ten years (1967–1976), was a member of the CRONWE office until 1974, but he was not particularly active; his successor, Herweijer (1976–1983), even less so. It was Jenno Witsen, above all, appointed director of General Affairs in 1967, who emerged within the service as the standard-bearer for Europe, from 1983 in his role as director-general.

A different, more positive explanation for the waning interest in CRONWE is that its message was slowly getting through, if only partially, to organizations outside CRONWE itself. Formal cooperation on spatial planning was established between different countries and regions within the CRONWE area. For instance in 1967, a Dutch-German Commission for Spatial Planning (*Nederlands-Duitse Commissie voor de Ruimtelijke Ordening*, NDCRO) was established. At the end of the 1960s, the informal Benelux commission on spatial planning, which had existed since 1952, was transformed into a commission that was formally affiliated with the Benelux Economic Union, the so-called Special Committee for Spatial Planning.

The longstanding wish of CRONWE’s members, that European ‘organs’ should take an ‘active interest’ in spatial planning, was also fulfilled. This was only a partial success, however, because it was not the European Community that became responsible for spatial planning; rather, it was the Council of Europe that came to the forefront in the second half of the 1960s.⁵⁹

Besides the Council of Europe, other bodies were also active, each in a different working area, both geographically and thematically. For example, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which had been founded in 1947, an expert committee, the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, was active from 1963.⁶⁰ This committee oversaw a Working party on urban and regional planning, as well as a number of subordinated working groups.⁶¹

⁵⁶Ibid., 6. Translation of the concepts between quotation marks by author.

⁵⁷Council of Europe, *Regional planning a european problem*.

⁵⁸Klerkx, *Plannen met Europa*, 157–158.

⁵⁹Martin, “Ruimtelijke ordening bij de raad van europa.”

⁶⁰One of the five ‘regional’ Commissions established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

⁶¹Klerkx, *Plannen met Europa*, 159 ff.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) became active during the 1960s, with a Working Party on Regional Development. In addition, in the 1970s a working group was set up that focused on the urban living environment, a group that was that ultimately – but not until 1982 – renamed the Group on Urban Affairs. A common trait among all these working relationships – there was a strong overlap in composition – was that they were all in fact networks of researchers and specialists with relatively little political clout. The sole exception was the Council of Europe, but here, the policy dimension was lacking.

If CRONWE had the field to itself when it was founded, ten to fifteen years later the scene had changed dramatically.⁶² Researchers and policy officials with an international or European interest could now take their pick, as it were. In the meantime, CRONWE had become an ageing institution, judging by the average age of (most) active members. The organization had great difficulty renewing its personnel, and the same names kept cropping up on participant lists for conferences. Additionally, the founding fathers were those who spoke at length, meaning that to the unsuspecting conference attendee, CRONWE would come across as an organization made up of and for an exclusive group of initiates.⁶³ By 1987, it even got to the point that the Dutch national spatial planning agency, squeezed by ever-tightening budgets, suspended its payments.⁶⁴ The border provinces of Limburg and North Brabant now stepped in to plug the financial gap. In the early 1990s, the RPD would again provide financial support for a short while, only to wash its hands of CRONWE for good around 1995 when it became fully emerged in the making of the European Spatial Development Perspective, which in terms of institutionalization, is a story on its own.⁶⁵ Lastly, The German members took their leave.

Within CRONWE it was said that the organization's objectives had been met, certainly when at the end of the 1990s, with European funding, a transnational cooperation programme was launched within the so-called North-Western Metropolitan Area (NWMA), featuring a few dozen projects on spatial research and design.⁶⁶ A kind of planning structure for the Delta thereby began to emerge, but it had a highly fragmented character, partly because the NWMA was much larger than the CRONWE region had ever been. This led to a degree of incoherence between the various sub-projects of what was nominally a programme. Admittedly, work was done on formulating a spatial vision, but the relationship with other, on-going projects was tenuous, if it existed at all.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Obviously planners from north-west Europe – nearly all working in planning administrations at national or (in the case of Germany) at state level – hoped that the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community and somewhat later the EEC could tilt spatial planning above the level of nation states. The reason why the creation of these new European organizations – the ECSC supranational and the EEC largely intergovernmental – did not materialize as a critical juncture nor later at any point of time lies in our view in an interpretation of spatial planning as primarily focussing on the changing urban morphology of (north-west) Europe.

⁶²Fit and Kragt, "The long road to European Spatial Planning."

⁶³The author participated in a number of conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁶⁴Klerkx, *Plannen met Europa*, 212.

⁶⁵There is an abundance of literature on the ESDP. See for instance Faludi and Waterhout, *The making of the European Spatial Development perspective*. In particular interesting from the HI approach is: Waterhout, *The institutionalisation of European spatial planning*.

⁶⁶European Commission, *INTERREG IIC Community Initiative Programme 1997–1999*.

⁶⁷Zonneveld, *Multiple Visioning*; Zonneveld, "Expansive spatial planning."

Urban morphology is in essence about land-use: urban spaces versus green belts and open spaces and various sorts of natural areas and landscapes, which meet the recreational and leisure demands of urban dwellers. This interpretation of spatial planning became strongly institutionalized in CRONWE circles and expressed over and over again at conferences and visualized through various sorts of maps which in their composition and legend became ever more refined (the reader is invited to compare the 1961 image of Figure 2 with Figures 3 and 4). In fact visualizing the morphology of Europe was an important part of CRONWE's activities. A general conclusion here, which possibly adds to the literature on historical institutionalism, that in investigating patterns of institutionalism in planning one should take into account how territories and places are imaged and, that changes in visualization and mapping, may indicate changes in deeper lying patterned norms and values: there is agency in mapping.⁶⁸

We have seen that during the early years of CRONWE the Dutch planner Vink did point out that within the countries and regions of Europe different traditions of spatial planning can be found each expressed in a different vocabulary. For instance the French *aménagement du territoire* might be translated in English as spatial planning – or in Dutch as *ruimtelijke ordening* or in German as *Raumordnung* – it is profoundly different as also Vink underlined. Nevertheless CRONWE – and for that matter Vink himself – regarded urban morphology as the object of what – throughout this paper – has been labelled as spatial planning. The explicit use of the Green Heart metaphor – originally a Dutch planning concept – in discussions of desired spatial developments at the European level, is a clear indication that the core of this concept is about zoning and land-use. Only on some occasions during these early years was lip service paid to the French notion of *aménagement du territoire*, which is not about urban morphology but about regional-economic development and policy efforts to soften regional differences in economic development. At one occasion – the 1958 CRONWE conference – a representative of the European Commission clearly underlined that this is also a prime concern for 'Europe'. As we have seen he contrasted the expansion of 'core areas' and harbour zones with falling levels of development in old industrial areas. 'Expansion' here did not have the connotation of cities becoming bigger and spilling over in the countryside but meaning 'rapid economic growth' to the benefit of welfare and prosperity across regions and cities.

Commission representatives do not intend to express their personal opinion at public occasions like a CRONWE conference. So the message of the Commission representative could not have been misunderstood. CRONWE however, did not change course fundamentally when it comes to the interpretation of spatial planning. In that sense we may conclude that the concept of path dependency has a highly valid relationship to CRONWE. We may even conclude that CRONWE became somewhat locked in its own discourse as its demise cannot only be explained in our view by the fact that other European organizations put spatial development – in all its variety in terms of content – at their agenda. Key member organizations lost interest because CRONWE eventually became what 'conference' in general means: an occasion where people meet and talk in a repetitive language and go home afterwards.

Having used the concept of 'path dependency' it is obvious we also have to look at the nature of the positive feedback loops in question, the prime cause of path dependency. We think that these are partly internal to CRONWE in the sense of the selection of topics to be addressed at CRONWE meetings, the values and opinions of selected key speakers or the content of the maps presented by obviously proud CRONWE members. One positive feedback loop might also be connected to

⁶⁸Corner, "The Agency of Mapping."

the build-up of planning systems at national level in a country like the Netherlands and to a lesser extent Belgium and at state level in Germany. Planning here primarily dealt with urban morphology issues. This in our view might have served as a kind of confirmation of the validity of the dominant CRONWE approach to spatial planning. It would be an interesting topic for further research why French approaches to spatial planning – *aménagement du territoire* at higher levels of scale and *urbanism* at lower levels – remained marginal within CRONWE.

In the 1980s, CRONWE began to address effects of de-industrialization like the emergence of industrial wastelands and regions and urban districts falling behind. CRONWE also started to address the relations between infrastructure and urban and economic development. However, at that stage alternative European platforms had emerged in which on the whole younger generations of European planners participated while the European Commission started its programmes on *territorial* cooperation between countries and regions.

To conclude, it may seem a bit odd to the reader that a paper seeks to apply historical institutionalism in a storyline about a somewhat forgotten organization which never institutionalized into anything permanent in the sense of EEC organizations taking over the objectives of CRONWE. However, historical institutionalism can also be used to explain failures such as the absence of critical junctures and the predominance of negative feedback loops, i.e. representatives of the European Commission claiming that the perception of what the term ‘spatial’ constitutes within CRONWE circles, is different to how ‘Europe’ sees this. This paper also suggests that institutionalization of discourse at a very basic level – ‘territoriality’ – can be a slow, and somewhat hidden process of a gradual acceptance of some core ideas: the territorial effects of European integration. This paper also shows that applying historical institutionalism in research into trajectories of spatial planning, or whichever terms one considers relevant here, should include a study of visual languages.

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