

Intergovernmental cooperation as a tool for integrated regional planning?

Assessing the Flemish mobility regions reform

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During recent decades, as a strategic response to a number of trends and developments, a wide range of organizational changes and new planning practices are being implemented to achieve better coordinated and more integrated policy outcomes. In this article, we explore the potential of the city-regional level as a platform to establish a more intense inter-governmental cooperation for addressing urban planning issues. For this purpose, we analyze a new policy frame which is currently being adopted in Flanders, leading towards the creation of 15 mobility regions on a city-regional level as an instrument for integrated regional mobility planning. By adopting a policy arrangement perspective, we scrutinize the practices and functioning that have resulted from this renewed framework so far and examine what possibilities this approach holds for achieving better coordination and alignment around broader spatial planning issues. To this end, we pay particular attention to the challenges that arise regarding the coordination with spatial planning practices within the current constellation and highlight the (conflicting) rationales that exist among the different policy actors involved to explain the latter. Our findings suggest that the advocated intergovernmental approach is promising and could function as an interesting test case for tackling urban-regional planning issues in a more integrated manner. However, in order to achieve this, the current degree of coordination between spatial and mobility planning still appears to be too weak and insufficient to achieve substantially integrated planning practices and policy outcomes.

Keywords: state rescaling, city-regional governance; intergovernmental cooperation; administrative reform

1. Problem statement

During recent decades, as a strategic response to a number of trends and developments that Western democracies are said to be facing, a wide range of organisational changes and new planning practices on various scales are being implemented, especially in the sphere of infrastructure development and environmental policy, to achieve better coordinated and more integrated policy outcomes (Da Cruz, 2019; Ahrend, 2014). Planning has been significantly affected in several ways: perspectives on the role, values and aims of planning processes have shifted; the material policy objectives and aims of planning have changed which has resulted in changes to the organization and governance of planning practice (Sager 2011). In the sphere of public transport, several authors have argued that due to the fragmented organizational landscape, it is important to study and explore how strategic governance of public transport evolves in response to institutional reform (Paulson, 2017; Rode 2019). Efficient public transport increasingly requires successful and more intense forms of collaboration and coordination between several discrete organizations (Hrelja, Pettersson, & Westerdahl, 2016).

In this paper we take an empirical stance towards this issue and examine how coordination and new planning practices take shape within a particular state and what driving forces are involved in the latter. Therefore, we explore the potential of the (city-)regional level as a platform to establish a more intense inter-governmental cooperation for addressing planning issues.

In many countries the perspective of the city-region has led and still leads to longstanding discussions about the redesign of governmental systems (Deas 2014; Eckardt 2015; Hodson 2020). This debate is mostly focused on the discussion whether or not to establish a city – regional government structure, either based on updated forms of intermunicipal cooperation or on the creation of a supralocal government, in a variety of types related to different forms of involvement of local governments (Balducci 2003; Levelt 2013). For example, France has been relatively successful by the creation of ‘communautés de ville’, now called ‘metropoles’ for a city-regional area, typically covering the territories of one big and many small local governments (Breuillard 2016). In other countries, such as the Netherlands, the UK or Germany, similar discussions were much less successful but city – regional policies still are considered to be of the utmost importance (Metze 2011; Zimmerman 2017). This is the case because the governance of city-regional areas is also considered part of the solution to other wicked problems, like more sustainable economic development, more intelligent mobility, a better urban quality of life, ... (Suo, Shen et al 2018; Tosics 2004).

Although an important body of literature deals with planning governance and city-regional governance from a theoretical perspective, several shortcomings in the current state of literature have been pointed out, both in terms of empirical soundness and conceptual depth (Da Cruz 2019). It is observed that a lack of research empirically captures how evolutions in modes of governance can be characterised in a particular policy area, explaining aspects of stability and change over time, compared to studies that take more normative positions (Hegggers 2020; Arnouts 2012). Krehl (2019)

states that, notwithstanding exceptions, few scholarly have taken an analytical and reflective stance on how theory-building has been linked to empirical work in case study research. Assessments about territorial governance should therefore be grounded more strongly in empirical evidence. Witzel (2019) states that there is a need for further studies on how contemporary organization and management perspectives affect planning practices. Studies covering different levels of government, and additional fields of planning practice (e.g. strategic planning, municipal land-use planning) would contribute to a wider scope of insights as well as allow for comparisons (Witzel 2019, p.1430).

We try to address the mentioned shortcomings of literature by adopting a policy arrangement perspective for our analysis of a recent case of (city-)regional governance in the region of Flanders. In the Flemish context, the formation of 'new state spaces' (Brenner 2004) can be witnessed in the development of several regional governance arrangements, in which state power is planned to be channelled and re-allocated to diverse types of sub-regions in various domains such as mobility planning, but also social and health care (Voets & De Rynck 2006). Currently, a new policy frame is being adopted in this respect, leading towards the creation of 15 mobility regions on a city-regional level as an instrument for integrated regional mobility planning.

In recent literature on policy coordination and governance, the policy arrangement approach has been put forward as a theory and formal analytical model that allows combining mechanisms of path dependency and change in the analysis of policy domains, especially in the area of environmental policy (Wiering et al. 2018; Hegger 2020). For our analysis, we build on the policy arrangement model, including elements from political science and public administration to provide an in-depth analysis of our case study. These elements include the relations with other arrangements, elements of context or the 'politics of space' (Healey 2006) like the local regime, features of the institutional relations (e.g. the intergovernmental relations between Flanders, provinces and local governments), the role of political localism and the bureaucratic tradition in Belgium and Flanders. These elements are combined together to describe and explain empirically territorial governance in Flanders within the mobility regions and leads us towards the following research questions:

How is territorial governance shaped in practice? What are the main drivers, the distinguishing characteristics and the impact of rescaling of governance in Flanders? Do new governance spaces affect deeply rooted politico-administrative practices? To what extent can policy coordination be achieved as a result? And what are the main explanatory factors of territorial governance?

2. Conceptual framework

To structure our analysis of the mobility regions as a case of territorial governance, we make use of the policy arrangement model as the main conceptual lens for our analysis (Arts & Leroy 2006). Van Tatenhove & Arts (2000) initially defined a policy arrangement as the temporary stabilisation of the content and organisation of a policy domain (p.54), building upon the assumption that institutions

within a given policy domain are to a certain extent stabilised into an institutional arrangement that shows certain characteristics.

Four dimensions are distinguished to analyse the content and organization of a policy arrangement: actor coalitions, division of resources, rules of the game and discourse. The relationship between these four dimensions is strongly interrelated, as symbolised by a tetrahedron (see figure below), where a change in one of the dimensions directly affects the others. Changes in the composition of coalitions, the mobilisation of new power resources, modifications in regulation or the introduction of new policy concepts could all lead towards changes in the arrangement, setting off a chain reaction that affects all the other dimensions. An analysis of a policy arrangement should therefore concern all of the dimensions of the concept, since stability and change in the arrangement can only be fully grasped from the interaction between the structural level and the level of action (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2004).

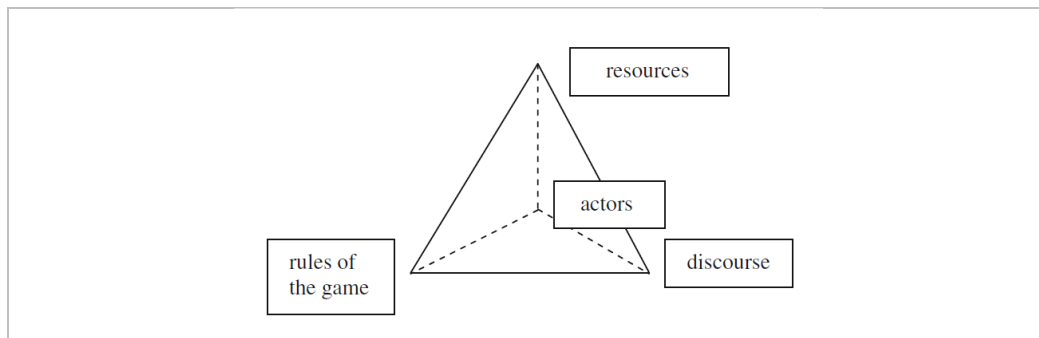


Figure 1. Dimensions of a policy arrangement (Van Tatenhove et al. 2000, p.99)

The policy arrangements approach claims to link up all the relevant dimensions of a policy, therefore enabling the study of the policy arrangement as a whole, conceptualising stability and change both in the content and the institutional organisation of a policy domain (Hegger 2020, p.5). The interplay of the four dimensions of a policy arrangement allows to describe in detail the combination of stabilising factors and change agents, helping to identify drivers of change and reasons for stability, which has proven its merits in the analysis of aspects of environmental policy, such as water policy or nature policy (Wiering 2018; Dang 2016).

In several ways the policy arrangement model bears similarities to other recent forms of governance analysis, such as the policy assemblage approach (Savage, 2020; Allen, 2007). Rather than understanding a policy as coherent thing or as definable as the sum of its constitutive components, an assemblage approach stresses that what is most important is understanding the nature of interactions between components and the capacities such components exhibit when arranged in different ways. (Savage 2020, p.322) The particular ways in which components are brought together will determine the outcome and effects of any given policy or agenda. Assemblages are the result of heterogeneous elements that are brought together into particular strategic relations and with

particular desired impacts. Rather than being an assortment, a policy assemblage can be understood as an arrangement of components in particular ways with the aim of governing conduct.

The governance of regions, and its spatiality, is conceived through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from the networks of relations that stretch across and beyond given local boundaries. The agencies, the partnerships, the political intermediaries, and the associations and connections that bring them together, increasingly form 'regional' spatial assemblages that are not exclusively regional, but bring together elements of central, regional and local institutions (Allen 2007, p.6).

Mees (2018) successfully applies the policy arrangement model for the analysis of the relationships between closely related policy domains, such as water policy and spatial planning. In this paper, we build on this approach by adopting the framework to further investigate the relationship between mobility policy and spatial planning, paying attention to stabilities and evolutions in the degree of coordination and alignment that can be achieved between both policy domains.

3. Methodology

In response to the research questions cited above, we provide an analysis of the functioning and driving forces of the mobility regions as a case of rescaling and regional governance in Flanders. The case of the mobility regions reform is therefore used as a single case study (Yin 2017).

Embedded in this case is the unit of analysis that is defined as coordination mechanisms facilitating the integration of policy in city-regional areas. The main groups of analysed integration mechanisms are the governance structures, planning processes, integration instruments, and enabling conditions. The effectiveness of these integration mechanisms is considered in relation to planning and policy capacity as judged by interviewees, rather than with regard to policy outcomes. The latter would be very difficult to establish given the considerable causal complexity between institutional arrangements and policy outcomes. In addition to this, the mobility regions reform was implemented recently and some parts of the planning process are still ongoing, so the final output of the reform cannot yet be determined.

With regard to our case selection, we identify the case of the mobility regions as a critical case (i.e., a governance arrangement that is of particular relevance for a better understanding of integrated urban practice), while also taking into consideration extreme case selection. We argue our case selection with the following arguments:

First, the mobility region case concerns a reform with an area-wide demarcation for the whole of Flanders. In this respect, the reform is more far-reaching and profound than many other governance arrangements operating the sphere of mobility and spatial planning in Flanders, such as spatial strategic projects, that only operate in specific areas.

Secondly, we notice that, in contrast to other arrangements, the practice of mobility regions involves all relevant supra-local players for regional cooperation in Flanders, i.e. local governments, intermunicipal associations, provincial governments and Flemish administrations, making it a critical case for understanding territorial governance in Flanders.

Thirdly, we identify the agenda of integrated mobility planning within the mobility regions as one of the key challenges for regional planning in Flanders, given the fact that local and central governments are the key players and hold the core competences in this domain. This is to a lesser extent the case for networks in the domains of care and economy because of the neo-corporatist tradition within Belgium and Flanders (Voets & De Rynck 2008).

Regarding the adopted research method, we argue that the complexity and the explanatory nature of the research encourages the use of a qualitative research design, for which a case study design was chosen (Yin 2017). Understanding how and mobility planning and urban development are related to each other requires access to tacit knowledge not readily available in existing documents and reports. Even though some of the organizational structures of the Flemish government, their agencies and planning processes are formally documented, they do not necessarily represent the day-to-day practice of urban policymaking, planning, and implementation. For this reason, the case study research is heavily based on expert interviews with key stakeholders centrally involved in taking the key decisions related to the planning process, as well as experts who have deep knowledge of the related processes and dynamics.

Empirical data was therefore collected through interviews and document studies. More specifically, three types of data sources were used for this case study research:

Firstly, the analysis is partly based on a strong involvement as action researchers in the transformation process of the Flemish mobility department, in addition to the analysis of legislative materials, evaluation reports and policy documents. Action-research aims to deal with real-world problems and explores new ways of doing together with stakeholders through the active involvement of the researcher in a cyclical process of action and reflection (May & Lathlean 2001). We took part as experts both at local level and the Flemish level of the central departments involved in this operation and also as members of expert teams brought together to reflect and advise the Flemish government.

Secondly, we entailed semi-structured elite interviews ($n = 18$) with civil servants managing the mobility regions and administrative officers in other affected Flemish mobility organizations, central Flemish mobility staff and mobility experts as external observers. All selected respondents had hands-on involvement in the planning processes of the mobility regions, and the interviews focused on practical experiences of applying the legislative process in a regional negotiation setting with local governments. These interviews allowed data triangulation and complemented and refined the insights gained from the formal document analysis. For example, the interviews revealed certain discussions

which were not documented in the council reports. All interviews (20 hours of recording material) were taped and transcribed verbatim (180 pages), thereby increasing the reliability of the research (Yin, 2017).

Thirdly, our preliminary analysis was also complemented by an analysis of interviews conducted by public administration students who, as part of a teaching assignment, conducted research in all of the 15 mobility regions and conducted interviews with civil servants and political representatives involved in the mobility region planning process (n=45).

All data was transcribed and coded using NVivo 12 Plus software. The conceptual model of the policy arrangements approach served as a heuristic lens for the coding of data.

4. Mobility regions: a tool for integrated regional planning?

We start our analysis by examining the extent to which the reform of the mobility regions leads towards substantial changes in the broader Flemish planning arrangement and provides opportunities for a more integrated regional approach to policy challenges. We do so by scrutinizing the degree of coordination that is being achieved within the planning arrangement and by examining in particular the impact of this reform on the coordination between spatial policy and mobility planning. Therefore we provide an overview of the factors fostering and hampering stability and change, using the four dimensions of the policy arrangement approach to structure our analysis and by discussing for each dimension the factors lead towards change or stability.

First, an overview is given of the important building blocks of the policy reform that constitute a rupture with the previous policy arrangement. Subsequently, we dig deeper into the factors that provide stability and continuity and may prevent a profound change.

4.1. Forces of change

Rules of the game

The mobility regions reform is facilitated by the introduction of a new institutional framework in which basic accessibility as a new policy approach is anchored by decree. The decree of basic accessibility stipulates the creation of 15 new mobility regions based on intermunicipal cooperation of the local governments in each of the 15 regions. The scale of the 15 regions, the cooperation and their competences are all imposed and regulated by the Flemish government itself. This is a new feature and breaks with the strong tradition of the sacrosanct 'autonomy' of the local governments and the free choice for intermunicipal cooperation, which is included in the concept of local autonomy.

Furthermore, the mobility region is based not only on a group of local governments: all the Flemish actors responsible for mobility, within the political realm of the present minister for mobility, have to

take part also in the mobility region. That is another novelty compared to the historical institutional heritage: the mobility region institutionalizes also the intergovernmental cooperation between the two levels of public administration that really matter, politically: local government and Flemish government. Seen from an institutionalist perspective, this feature of the mobility regions could be described as a rupture with the institutional history of Flemish planning arrangements and the intergovernmental relations involved.

The shift from basic mobility to basic accessibility also goes hand in hand with a new geographical demarcation of mobility regions (see figure 1). The delineation process of the mobility regions was the output of an administrative cooperation between the departments of Mobility and Environment (competent for spatial planning), a new form of cooperation and an exponent of the pressure towards a more integrated approach towards policy making at the Flemish level. Based on mobility flows, functional relations and existing types of regional cooperation 19 'hypothesis regions' were delineated. Later in the process this proposal became the object of a political deliberation which resulted in a final delineation of 15 mobility regions (see map below). This political deliberation did not change the map drastically: the technical-scientific work was retained by approximately 80% in the final choices and that the political interventions were not at odds with that work.



Figure 2. Delineation of the mobility regions

Policy discourses

The mobility regions are being rolled out to implement a new policy approach in mobility planning, being the frame of basic accessibility, which replaces the old framework of basic mobility. The principle of basic mobility, which has been since 2001 the dominant policy frame for mobility, dictated a minimum supply of public transport for each residential area in Flanders. This is now been considered as a very inefficient and too expensive public transport system given the actual spatial structure of Flanders, dominated by a high degree of what has been labelled as 'urban sprawl' (Verbeek, Boussauw et al. 2014).

The new principle of basic accessibility, that underlies mobility region reform, propagates a new policy frame, based on the concepts of an integrated network approach of public transport designed along the idea of combi-mobility. Basic accessibility functions as part of a mobility network where combinations of different modes of transport (car, bike, bus, train) are facilitated. To achieve this layered type of transportation, a hierarchic model is established that differentiates between four types of public transportation: the train network, the core network, the complementary network and the customized network.

A new mobility region council is established which has a dual task: on the one hand it is responsible for drawing up a short-term public transport plan and on the other for drawing up a regional mobility plan, which also includes all aspects of regional mobility. The transport region councils are chaired by a political chairman from one of the belonging municipalities and a chairman from the Department of Mobility and Public Works. The final approval of a regional mobility plan, however, is done by the Flemish Government. Within the framework of an approved regional mobility plan, the Mobility region Council then has the following tasks:

- Defining the supplementary network lines and customized transport lines and giving advice on the train network and the core network;
- Prioritize, monitor and evaluate regional mobility programs and projects of strategic importance at the level of the mobility region;
- To advise regional authorities in the preparation of the integrated investment program;
- Defining the supra-local functional bicycle route network, with the exception of bicycle highways, on which the council only gives advice;
- Monitor the interconnection of transport and infrastructure networks and facilitate combi mobility and synchromodality;
- Prioritize, monitor and evaluate traffic safety and flow measures.

These tasks are therefore a mix of own responsibilities, giving advice to the Flemish government and tasks related to the follow-up, but always within a central framework that allows the Flemish government to overturn decisions taken by the mobility region.

Policy actors and coalitions

Groups of local government

The Flemish Government, through the creation of the 15 mobility regions, decided to deconcentrate delegated tasks for mobility planning and policy to 15 groups of local governments via mobility region councils, and not to the local governments on an individual basis. So far, those tasks have not belonged to the autonomous realm of local governments. Local governments therefore are operating as a politico-administrative deconcentrated branch of the central government. The set of delegated tasks contains an advisory role, a role of co-decision with central government and a role of new responsibilities for the mobility needs of targeted groups.

We observe that many local politicians and civil servants state that thanks to their involvement in the mobility regional council the contacts between Flemish mobility actors and (groups of) local government are now much more numerous and intense than before. There seems to be a growing mutual understanding of points of interest and governance cultures, leading towards a growing mutual trust and an enhanced cooperation between the local and central level within the mobility regions.

Team MOW

The mobility regions, as a part of the evolution towards basic accessibility, do not only affect the cooperation between (groups of) local governments, but also have a profound impact on the Flemish government itself. The shift towards basic accessibility and the creation of the mobility regions lead to important organizational changes regarding the administrative reorganization, the working methods, the budgets and the reallocation of the staff in the Flemish department of mobility and public Infrastructure (MOW), the agency of roads and traffic (AWV) and the Flemish transport company (De Lijn). Those are the three important and influential Flemish actors, within the realm of competences of the Flemish minister of mobility.

The Flemish bodies that are part of the composition of the mobility region council, the department of mobility (MOW), the agency of roads and traffic (AWV), the Flemish transport company (De Lijn), unite per region in the 'team MOW', a new established coordination platform for Flemish mobility actors. This team can be further expanded with other Flemish operational bodies active in the mobility region. The team is chaired by a representative of the Department of MOW active in the mobility region. It is a consultative forum in which the partners involved in the MOW policy domain streamline their points of view and speak with one voice within the mobility region council from a coherent vision. On the other hand, they are responsible for information flow within their entities between the central level and the mobility region.

The Flemish public transport (buses and trams) is organized so far by 'De Lijn', which is an autonomous agency of the Flemish government. Until now, the local political pressure for better public transport services reached 'De Lijn' through party political networks and central-local relations. The creation of the mobility regions should give local governments more responsibilities and more control over the planning and organization of the regional transport network, decentralizing power from 'De Lijn' towards groups of local government in the mobility region councils. This means also that 'De Lijn' should adapt her internal organization, developing towards a more decentralized organization acting in 15 mobility regions.

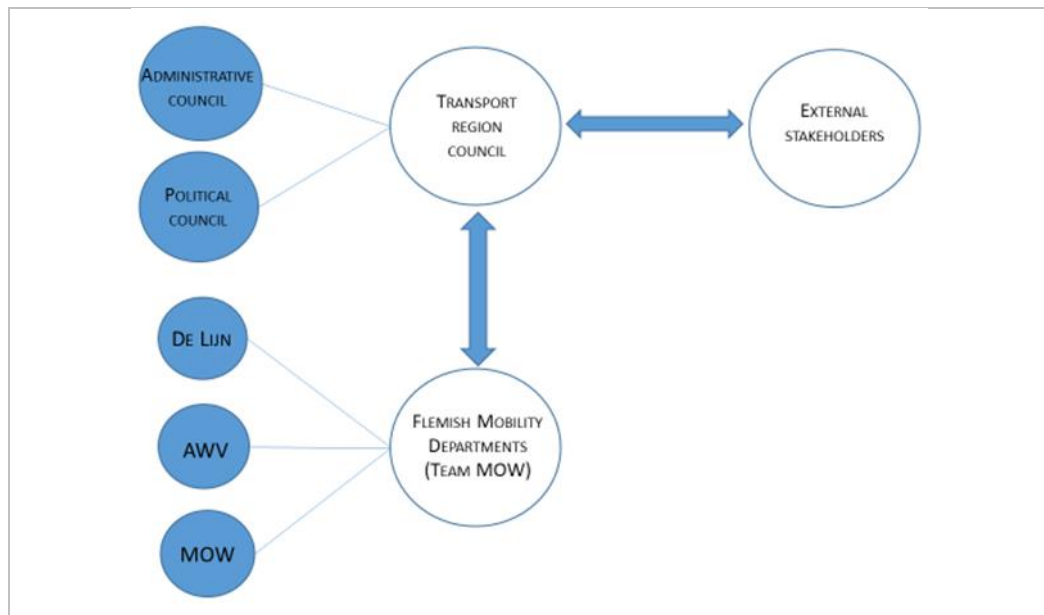


Figure 3. Governance structure of the mobility regions

Power and resources

Staff capacity

When we zoom in on the changes at the level of administrative capacity to support the mobility regions, we witness that the mobility region staff resulted from a reallocation of the existing staff of mobility councillors formerly operating at a provincial working scale. This existing team (about 25 staff members) within the policy department was assigned to a mobility region, either for the position of co-chair or as regional counsellor. This reorganization was carried out through a global reallocation of personnel, maintaining the existing pool of civil servants by assigning everyone to a new position. Furthermore, external consultants also play an important role in the elaboration of content and the process of the regional mobility plan and provide a strong support for the latter. The quality of this external input, as well as the extent to which tailor made solutions for the regional area-specific challenges can be delivered, is identified as important success factor by the involved actors.

Budgetary capacity

From a budgetary point of view, the mobility region reform means that the investment programs of the different Flemish mobility entities have been merged into an integrated investment programs for the entire policy area. This integrated program replaces the separate investment programs that the various entities used to draw up and offers the possibility of looking at the investments of the policy area from the mode and network-wide viewpoint that is required for a future-oriented policy on mobility and public works. In this way, the planned investments of the various entities can be better coordinated and synergies can be created. This should of course be done taking into account the state of the networks, based on a policy domain-wide strategy on 'asset management'.

Therefore, a key innovation of the mobility region reform is that the local authorities will have a say in and control over Flemish mobility budgets. The idea is to give local authorities more say in public transport on their territory, with a say in the supplementary public transport network and full say in the lowest transport layer, being the 'customized' transport.

4.2. Forces of stability

Despite the fact that the mobility region reform contains important aspects of change within the current Flemish planning arrangement; we also identify some aspects of stability that are more likely to be an extension of previous interactions and practices and which could act as barriers to strong change in the planning arrangement.

Rules of the game

The historical development of the mobility planning arrangement teaches us that the new institutional framework didn't just come out of nowhere. Practitioners involved testify that there was already a strong interaction between local administrations and the Flemish mobility actors and between the Flemish actors themselves throughout different coordination bodies like advisory boards and guidance committees, albeit not on a regional level. Also, there was already a form of objectification and coordination of the decision-making process between the administrative levels, where policy decisions were evaluated by quality control bodies and external assessment experts. The interaction between local administrations and the MOW department could therefore already be characterized as intense. We also see these characteristics reflected in the next phase of the mobility regions reform and it seems correct to conclude that this phase builds on the praxis of the preceding arrangement, retaining some of the main characteristics of the previous model. The mobility region could therefore be considered as a next generation within the policy arrangement. The most important structural change, besides the policy content concept of basic accessibility, is mainly the way in which intergovernmental collaboration now is organized on a (city-)regional scale.

The observation that the current mobility region practice in certain respects builds on the previous planning practices is also evidenced by certain difficulties from the past that still seem to be present in the current arrangement. These increased contacts between local and Flemish government take place within a central framework which is perceived as particularly stringent by local mandataries, which makes it difficult to provide sufficient tailor-made solutions and to take regional diversities sufficiently into account. The rigid setting and timing within which negotiations have to take place leads to frustration among local administrations. In this respect, there still appears to be some mistrust between central and local government, with a strong top-down mentality blamed on the Flemish government from a local perspective and a lack of knowledge about local dynamics and decision-making at municipal level. In this respect, a thorough understanding of the logic of local political

decision-making appears to be of great added value to advance the decision making process within the mobility regions but appears to be insufficiently present within the Flemish government.

Policy discourses

Despite the strong emphasis on coordination and cooperation in the policy discourse, we find that the effective coordination of mobility planning with the spatial planning policy remains limited in practice, with the historically compartmentalised policy approach from the Flemish government still having a strong impact on the current functioning of the policy arrangement.

The ambition of the mobility regions to develop a more efficient mobility system is strongly interwoven with the issue of counteracting urban sprawl, making a close collaboration between the domains of mobility and urban spatial planning necessary. At an administrative level, the delineation of the mobility regions was the result of a close collaboration between the top administrators of the Department of Mobility and the Department of Environment, resulting in a mutually agreed scale as a basis for future sub regional development planning. This collaborative relationship between both domains at the administrative levels is in itself also a breakthrough in administrative traditions, but it stands in contrast with the conflictual interactions within the political sphere of government. The delineation of the mobility regions is therefore not retained as a policy scale for spatial planning, which, in the former Flemish Government, was one of the core competencies of the Christian Democratic Party that also delivered the minister responsible for spatial planning. The minister refused to integrate her own plans for 'a better integrated subregional spatial planning' in the concept and the institutional form of the mobility regions. This exemplifying pattern illustrates the way the Flemish Government works and how opposite interests try to find their way throughout the Flemish official and political constellation. This is reflected directly in the organisation and ambitions but also the ambiguity of the mobility regions. Discussing mobility planning without reference to urban sprawl and spatial planning seems to be impossible.

Policy actors and coalitions

(Lack of) Leadership

The extent to which planning practices within the mobility region can lead to effective change is directly linked to the dynamics that can emerge among actors in the mobility region council and the degree of involvement and the leadership that is assumed by local and central government.

We observe large differences in dynamics between the different regions, which is related to the role assumed by the political chair and the degree of leadership which is shown here. Several co-chairs testify that in their regions, the political chair himself actively takes charge of the meetings and actively seeks consensus among the members. In this case, the role of the official co-chair shifts more explicitly to the support of the political chair, who steers actively the decision-making and negotiation process himself. The fact that these consultations are drawn from a political mandatary, locally

anchored in the region, has the consequence that this process is perceived by those involved as real regionally embedded cooperation with a strong local support base.

However, this political leadership does not appear to be present in all mobility regions. In some regions political leadership is not or much less at stake, which leads towards a situation where the Flemish co-chair has to take on this leading role by himself. This leads to a different type of dynamic, which also means that the mobility region in that case is perceived more as a top-down Flemish vehicle with rather little regional support. In these cases, it seems uncertain whether there will be sufficient local support to actually put the regional ambitions into practice.

Existing regional networks

Another hampering factor which might affect the impact of the mobility regions is the lack of coordination with the scale levels at which cooperation already takes place within the regions and the fragmentation that exists regarding the latter.

The extent to which the scale boundaries of mobility region corresponds to existing scales of regional cooperation, where for example a strong intermunicipal cooperation is taking place, seems to facilitate and smoothen the consultation and cooperation between different regional collaborations. In the regions where these scale are strongly fragmented, this results in complex actor constellations and high transaction costs, which also has a negative impact on the effectiveness and functioning of the mobility regions.

Closely related to the latter are the regional visioning processes that already were developed in some of the existing regions before the planning processes of the mobility region initiated. Within several regions, planning processes around regional mobility were already in development, resulting in actor constellations which were already established and to which the mobility region processes had to relate in a certain way. Quite some regions seem to be experiencing difficulties in accommodating existing regional constellations in the mobility region process. Differences in actor coalitions, leadership roles and (financial) preconditions are aspects that seems to give rise to conflicts between existing regional vision practices from the bottom up with the more centrally managed mobility region planning process. Within the regions where this bottom-up regional vision creation is already maturing, regional coalitions criticize the Flemish mobility actors for wanting to keep a strong grip on the agenda and policy making in the mobility region. The latter makes it hard for existing regional actors to get involved and to insert the already existing agenda's and compromises in the process. Partly this may have to do with personal relations and certainly the restrictions of the institutional framework also have a play here, but a form of centralism seems to play a role as well, making it more difficult for the Flemish government to be responsive to 'soft space' area images and plans that have already been discussed in the region itself, often even with the participation of actors from Flemish mobility department itself.

(Lack of) Flemish policy integration

Political-administrative tensions do not only seem to play a role between the local and central level, but also appear to play a crucial role within the Flemish government itself and the level of power and ambition that can be mobilised within the mobility regions. The degree of coordination and integration between different policy domains and administrations that can be achieved seems to be strongly linked to the latter.

We already stated that despite the initial joint official commitment in the preparation of the mobility region between the Departments of Mobility and Spatial Planning and the intense involvement and technical input of the Spatial Planning Department in the demarcation process, it was decided at the political level to not link aspects of spatial policy to the mobility region scale. In contrast to the original ambitions, the scale of the mobility region does not therefore serve as a policy scale for spatial policy programmes. Therefore, coordination with the regional development ambitions in the Flemish Spatial Policy Plan is lacking. However, some of the policy issues of the mobility regions, such as the determination of public transportation hubs, are closely tied to aspects of the strategic vision of the Flemish Spatial Policy Plan. Whether such discussions will ultimately lead to operational decisions is still an open question, but it seems undeniable that the mobility policy developed in the mobility regions will influence spatial choices.

Despite the lack of political agreement, we notice an official cooperation between the departments of Mobility and Spatial Planning which is being established in order to cooperate more actively within the mobility region on a more operational level. A mutual platform is therefore installed to achieve better coordination between both organizations and sets up joint working groups to tackle, in an integrated manner, problems in which both policy areas interfere with each other. In this way, for a number of rather technical aspects, coordination between planning and mobility aspects is taking place, albeit rather on the side-lines and away from more politically sensitive dossiers.

When we take another step further and examine the extent to which the ambitions of integrated mobility planning and modal shift are in line with broader developments within the Flemish spatial policy and also the land-use praxis, we notice a strong lack of coordination and coherence between the policies in both domains. Until today, the actual spatial development of Flanders is still to a large extent dictated by the national zoning plans (gewestplannen) from the seventies (Vermeiren, Vervoort et al. 2018), offering a rich supply of building land and industrial areas, enabling the actual Flemish suburban sprawl (De Decker 2011). In addition to this, we notice the last two decades a strong trend towards decentralization of competences to the local level (Nadin 2018), in combination with regulatory changes which are mostly oriented towards simplifying procedures and the reduction of the turnaround time of building permits, providing also more opportunities to deviate from existing zoning plans (Coppens and Vloebergh 2017). The combination of the latter seems to amplify a (already existing) market oriented approach to land use planning (Lind 2002), strongly oriented towards private real estate development, giving more freedom to local government for further urbanization and leading towards an increasing pressure on the (already scarce) open space left.

These dynamics continue to develop in parallel with the mobility region reform and the latter does not seem to have any significant impact on these trends in the spatial domain.

Power and resources

Finally, the impact and strength of the mobility regions reform is also closely linked to the capacity that can be mobilized among the various actors involved. Here, too, we identify some points of concern that affect its functioning and may constitute an obstacle to real change.

Staff capacity

There is consensus among the involved Flemish and local actors that an active participation as a local administration in the functioning of the mobility region puts a lot of pressure on the local official capacity and competences. Great differences can be observed between local administrations in terms of the staff capacity that can be engaged in the official preparatory meetings. Especially the smaller municipalities do not have full time staff available to follow up on the mobility regions and appear to be very vulnerable in this respect, risking to drop out of the planning process in some regions. In the regions where an intermunicipal association is a member of the mobility region, we witness a supportive role being taken towards the smaller municipalities in particular, facing the most urgent capacity problems to participate adequately in the process. In this respect, the intermunicipal associations, besides also the provincial authorities, can help to ensure that the voice of each municipality is heard sufficiently and no one is left behind.

In addition to official capacity, expertise and experience among political representatives also appears to be a factor that determines the quality of discussions and negotiations that can be held within the mobility region council. A lack of time or political experience on the part of political representatives appear to be crucial factors in the functioning of the political council. In each mobility region, there are clear differences in the degree of involvement, the expertise and the authority of the mayors and the competent aldermen respectively.

Within the Flemish mobility departments, aspects of capacity also appear to be an issue. The reorganisation of the mobility regions was carried out through a global reallocation of staff, whereby the entire existing group of civil servants was assigned to new positions, with no additional staff capacity. This leads to the fact that a lot of officials have to combine a role as co-chair and as counsellor within different mobility regions. This role combination is experienced as very tough in practice and might threaten the continuity of policy processes at peak times. There seems to be a clear lack of capacity and available staff, which is also reflected by the demand from different co-chairs to have a full-time staff available for each mobility region, which is currently lacking.

Generally speaking, the involved stakeholders assess the selection of co-chairs for the mobility region councils as successful, consisting of officials having the necessary skills to take on this role. Nevertheless, the position of co-chair requires a number of specific management competencies that

were not always present in the existing group of civil servants. Within one mobility region, this lack of own suitable staff resulted in the co-chair role being taken on by an external consultant, which clearly demonstrates that existing capacity is insufficient in certain areas.

Financial capacity

The capacity that the mobility region reform can mobilise is also closely linked to the influence that can be exerted on financial budgets. Also from this angle we witness some aspects that critically question the degree of coordination achieved within the mobility regions.

We already stated that an important boundary for the policy arrangement is the choice of the Flemish government to work within the framework of budget neutrality, with fixed financial allocations for each mobility region. The financial allocation per region is based on the current operating budget of De Lijn, which means that the distribution of public transport lines within the different transport layers must be done on the basis of budgets that are provided for the current exploitation plan. There is considerable scepticism among interviewees as to whether these budgets can be sufficient to bring about a real modal shift and change in mobility behaviour, as advocated by the basic accessibility agenda of the mobility regions.

So far, the current agenda within the mobility region council has mainly concerned the specific public transport component within the regional mobility plan, with the Flemish transport company (De Lijn) in particular being the most involved Flemish partner in terms of content. As a result, the agency of roads and traffic (AWV), which controls the most important investment budgets at the Flemish level, has so far been present at the council and participated in discussions within the mobility region council, but has not yet really come into the picture as a central actor. Currently, the AWV regional manager are not only operating within the mobility region councils, but in practice also takes on many other tasks that are running parallel to the mobility region praxis. For example, the (previously existing) one-to-one contacts with local authorities and the existing working scales of the agency do not get affected by the mobility region reform. These practices suggest that in some areas the prior decision making processes on budget allocation still have a strong impact, an observation that has some respondents openly questioning the influence that the transportation region council will be able to exert over available budgets. Also, various Flemish officials point in this respect to numerous factors that influence the timing of investment programmes, including direct political guidance from the minister's office. Some officials state that in this respect political control is regaining its importance, where official objective prioritisation of mobility infrastructure investments plays less of a role than it used to play.

Forces of stability	Dimensions of the policy arrangement	Forces of Change
<p>Lack of support for an integrated regional agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of a binding Flemish framework for spatial planning - Conflicting expectations and rationales among the involved local and Flemish actors 	<p>Policy discourses</p>	<p>New ideas, problem definitions and policy concepts in the basic accessibility approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combi-mobility - Cost-efficiency concerns
<p>Coordination effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak coordination with the spatial planning department - Fragmentation of existing regional networks 	<p>Policy actors and coalitions</p>	<p>New policy actors & coalitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team MOW + Groups of local government - Local mobility region council chairs
<p>Legislative lock-in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legislative impact of regional spatial plans - Perceived rigidity of the institutional framework by local actors 	<p>Rules of the game</p>	<p>Strong legislative impact of the decree of basic accessibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New geographical demarcation of 15 mobility regions - Institutionalisation of intergovernmental dialogue collaboration between Flemish gov & groups of local government
<p>Limited financial and administrative resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reallocation of the existing staff capacity - Fixed financial allocations per region ('closed envelopes') - Unclear engagement of the Flemish Road Agency, managing the main financial resources 	<p>Power and resources</p>	<p>New financial instruments and administrative functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment of regional office managers to each mobility region - regional budget prioritisation via integrated investment programs

Table 1. Forces of stability and change within the policy arrangement (based on Wiering et al., 2018)

5. Conclusions

In this paper we examined the main characteristics and the impact of regional rescaling processes on planning arrangements in Flanders. We took an empirical stance towards the case of the mobility regions as a case of how regional governance is shaped in practice by examining the driving forces and the impact of this reform on local and central government. By applying the theoretical framework of the policy arrangement approach we brought into focus forces of change and stability regarding the different dimensions of the policy arrangement, being the challenges that are being put on the regional agenda, the group of actors that is being involved, the resources being mobilised and the institutional framework (rules of the game) in which the arrangement takes concrete form.

Our analysis revealed that the reform introduces some important changes in Flemish planning arrangements, establishing for the first time a structural cooperation between groups of local authorities and Flemish actors working in a more integrated regional manner. In addition to this, new (city)-regional planning scales are being installed, besides the introduction of new coordination platforms and an increased regional allocation of administrative and budgetary capacity. It is beyond discussion that the coordination between Flemish policy actors has been strengthened and is more intensive, less formal and more efficient than before. Also from a local perspective, the direct contacts within the mobility region are appreciated and ensure a better flow of information and a strongly intensified intergovernmental cooperation.

Despite the fact that the coordination between Flemish (mobility) actors and local governments has clearly been strengthened by the reform, we also notice that different sectoral logics still play a role within the planning arrangements. Because of this, the coordination and the interaction with spatial planning is still clearly deficient. Several of our findings regarding the lack of regional coordination within Flemish spatial planning policy and the fragile administrative and financial capacity of the transport regions indicate that a policy discourse aimed at integration and alignment does not necessarily lead to effective coordination among all relevant policy actors when implemented in practice and that coordination ambitions can still clash with features like sectoral logics, vested societal interests and political power bases..

In this respect, our findings show that for a proper understanding of the functioning of regional governance arrangements that the local-central administrative and political relationships at play throughout these arrangements and the relationships and tensions between policy actors within them are crucial aspects to be taken into account when providing a thorough assessment of policy reforms. In order to map out this interplay, the theoretical framework of the policy arrangement offers a sufficient theoretical and analytical basis for analysis, on condition that sufficient attention is paid to the behaviour of both political and administrative actors, including aspects of capacity, leadership and the relationship with other existing regional networks. Based on our analysis we state that the latter

include crucial aspects in understanding the driving forces behind and outcomes of regional governance rescaling processes in Flanders .

Therefore we argue on a theoretical level that a policy arrangements approach which also pays attention to content, process and political characteristics provides an useful analytical tool to empirically capture the various dimensions of rescaling processes in greater detail. Therefore the framework allows for sufficient analytical depth and for comparisons within case study research and can thus be part of a response to the criticisms formulated regarding the latter in the literature.

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