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## How to govern for sustainable tourism? An evaluation of the Dutch governance approach to sustainability

This paper evaluates the incorporation of sustainable development principles of governance in the Dutch governance structure for domestic tourism. The paper evaluates the strategies, policy instruments, actor-structures and distribution of competences for tourism development, taking as reference the 2005 joint-report of UNEP-WTO "Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers" (2005). The main finding is that there has been a *limited and only symbolic innovation of tourism governance based on sustainability principles*. Further, the paper discusses the governance preferences for domestic tourism in the Netherlands, drawing on the responses to a questionnaire filled in by 44 actors across a wide range of stakeholders. The main conclusion is stakeholders' governance preferences differ significantly. For certain actors, neo-liberal principles of governance are highly cherished and they differ from the "UNEP-WTO model"; but some still agree that voluntary policy coordination across scales and domains has added-value for sustainability. Other actors seem quite concerned with sustainability; but they do not really know if a "UNEP-WTO model" would indeed help the cause of promoting sustainable tourism development.

### 1 Introduction

The literature on sustainable tourism has been growing in the last two decades. Although there is yet no consensus on a definition of sustainable tourism and a comprehensive, widely endorsed theoretical framework for its investigation (Hardy et. al., 2002; Hunter, 1997; Saarinen, 2006; Butler, 1999; McCool et. al., 2001), academic attempts were made to operationalize the concept at different geographical and governance levels, for various types of tourism products, and for various aspects of tourism. Declarations, charters, guidelines, handbooks, best practice documentation and certification schemes have become available to those interested in implementing the concept. Policy recommendations have been also formulated advising national, regional and local public authorities on how to best elaborate tourism policies and coordinate them with the other relevant policy domains in order to facilitate the sustainable development of tourism. Important international institutions and organizations such as the European Union, and the United Nations Environment Program also stepped into the debate by formulating recommendations for sustainable tourism governance and policies (EU, 2003; WTO, 1998; UNEP-WTO, 2005).

But what has been the uptake so far of such recommendations? The literature on the design and adoption of sustainable tourism policies and innovative governance arrangements is expanding (see Pridham, 2000; Berry and Ladkin, 1997; Farsari et. al., 2007; Parker, 1999; Wight, 1998; Bianchi, 2004). A part of such investigations is focused

at destination and regional levels. Tourism is largely a local phenomenon, but its development and sustainability is tightly related to developments in other policy domains, and autonomous developments. Evaluations of governance innovations at national levels, drawing on political science, are also necessary, as complementary approach (Richter, 1983; Hall, 1994).

This paper contributes to the academic discussion on the uptake of international recommendations on governance and policy-making for sustainable tourism. It empirically analyzes the attempts to innovate the Dutch governance structure for domestic tourism to accommodate sustainable development principles, and the stakeholders' perceptions on this issue. The paper addresses two research questions.

1. What is the extent and adequacy of incorporating the governance principles of sustainable development in the Dutch domestic tourism sector?

2. What are the perceptions and governance preferences of the key stakeholders for the incorporation of sustainability principles in tourism governance?

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 specifies the concept of governance structure used in this paper. Section 3 discusses the main impulses for tourism governance innovations based on sustainable development principles in the Netherlands. Section 4 presents the main developments in tourism governance since early 1990s. This part of the paper looks at the extent and adequacy of changes in several key governance structure features from the standpoint of internationally endorsed principles of governance for sustainability. The assessment is made that governance developments have been so far limited and symbolic.

Section 5 presents stakeholders' preferences for the governance of the domestic tourism sector (for strategies, policy instruments, actor-structures and distribution of competences). This section also compares these governance preferences from the standpoint of the UNEP-WTO recommendations. Section 6 concludes the paper with reflections on the prospects for sustainable development in the Dutch domestic tourism sector.

## **2 Theoretical framework - key features of governance structure**

In this paper, governance is understood as in the conceptualization of the political scientists Kooiman (1993: 2), as encompassing all the relevant activities of the economic, political, administrative and social actors that influence the performance of the studied sector. The performance in this case is the multi-dimensional sustainability in the development of tourism, including economic, social, environmental, nature, mobility, landscape quality, and safety dimensions.

Political science and policy literature on the definition of *governance* is extremely large. Many models have been proposed for the conceptualization and analysis of governance (Bressers and Kuks, 2004; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Lynn and Hill, 2003; Heritier, 2002; Nootboom, 2006; Lynn, Heinrich and Hill, 2001; Lafferty, 2006; Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Governance may be described at various levels of abstraction and numerous factors may emerge as interesting to discuss when analyzing governance. Due to space restrictions, this paper does not review this literature. In this paper only *three features of governance structures* are selected and discussed, drawing on a model proposed by Bressers and Kuks (2004). These features are of crucial importance for the way many other, more detailed, features are organized and operate. Their importance for practice emerged also during empirical research, after the analysis of the currently known negative impacts of tourism-recreation (see Appendix).

The first governance structure is that of *actor structure at national level*: who has

competences for policy-making and implementation at national level for tourism, and how is interaction organized with actors responsible for other relevant policy domains. The second is that of *strategies and policy instruments*: to what extent and on which aspects are the instruments for tourism development integrated/coordinated with those in other relevant policy domains? How adequate is policy domain integration/coordination? Which policy domains are still disconnected from the tourism governance structure? The third governance structure feature refers to the *vertical coordination of actors across governance scales*: local, regional, provincial and national. What are the aspects and forms of cooperation between national and sub-national authorities?

The design of the three governance structure features affects the sustainability performances of the tourism sector. This paper analyzes the three governance features by focusing mostly on the competences, activities and policy outputs of political and administrative actors, as key drivers in the thorough reshuffling of governance that sustainability requires. Political actors include Parliament members, and members of provincial and local councils, ministers and state secretaries. Administrative actors refer to policy personnel in ministries and public agencies, provincial and local departments of sub-national authorities. Williams and Shaw also see such actors as key actors in tourism “given the weakness of the other agents of governance” (1998: 376).

## **2.1 Research methodology**

The research methodology used for this paper consisted of:

- literature and document analysis;
- 27 in-depth interviews with political (parliament members), public (ministries, provincial authorities, IPO, VNG), commercial, knowledge and NGO actors (see at the end of References);
- survey of perceptions, governance preferences, sector knowledge and values by means of questionnaire returned by 44 respondents in all the above actor-categories.

## **3 Impulses for sustainable tourism governance in the Netherlands**

Stimuli for sustainable tourism governance innovations come from two sources: international and political; domestic and mostly academic. The *internationally stimuli* are non-binding, but Dutch political and administrative actors are interested in building an international image of a country marching ahead of the sustainability revolution. The 1992 and 2002 international treaties for sustainable development, signed in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg, were transposed in national governmental strategies for sustainability, addressing among others also the domestic tourism sector.

At European level, there is no guidance in the EU Treaty regarding a community policy for tourism that would justify the use of direct regulation instruments. So far, EU perceives its role as formulating general goals, and issuing soft policy instruments such as recommendations and guidelines (Mc Donald et. al., 2003). It is up to the Member States to design governance structure features that would best pursue these goals, given their resource, economic and social contexts.

The *domestic stimuli* to innovate the tourism governance structure come mainly from knowledge actors, such as university institutes and education-related research groups,

consultancies, and public research centres. They argue that the way the governance structure is organized and functions in the Netherlands, fails to enable the sustainable development of tourism (Lengkeek, 1994; Caalders, 2002; Berkers et. al., 1996; RLG, 2006; RMNO, 2003; SME and RIZK, 2002; RLG, 2005[a]; Vromraad 2006). Knowledge actors base their arguments on research reports and studies documenting the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, nature, local community and local economies. The negative impacts of tourism are summarized in the Appendix.

### **3.1 Recommendations for sustainable tourism governance**

In 2005 the United Nations Environment Program and World Tourism Organizations (UNEPWTO) jointly published the report: "Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for policy Makers". The report formulates recommendations that refer to actor structures and competences, strategies, instruments and resources deployable at various governance levels most likely to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism. In this case study, the UNEP-WTO report was selected as a reference point for a vision on governance for sustainable tourism development. Based on a wide literature search, it was concluded that this report presents the most comprehensive set of governance recommendations available so far, giving detailed recommendations regarding also the roles of political and administrative actors in sustainable tourism. The report makes refined suggestions for countries with centralized and decentralized principles of governance.

The UNEP-WTO recommendations regarding *the first selected governance feature* - national-level actors and structures - are as follows (2005, 52):

- "Irrespective of the location of tourism within government, (...) there should be a formal structure and process for inter-ministerial cooperation on tourism. (...) In addition to these inter-ministerial structures, ministries may collaborate to support or implement specific initiatives. (...) It is helpful if such collaborative structures, agreements and actions are formalized by protocols or memoranda of understanding".
- "Ideally what is required is a permanent forum or standing conference based on a large number of invited stakeholders representing different interests, and a smaller body or council, perhaps elected from the above, dealing with more detailed work".

The *second key governance feature* considered in this paper is that of integration or coordination of strategies and instruments across policy domains. "Sustainable development is holistic in nature. It therefore requires synchronization of policies and coordination of actions between sectors". (UNEP-WTO, 2005: 55). National tourism-recreation strategies based on sustainability ideas are expected:

- to offer good guiding to all relevant ministries and agencies for the design and implementation of policy instruments and action programs that have direct/indirect impacts on the development of tourism and recreation;
- to "stimulate and control the private sector and potential investors"
- to "provide a framework for tourism policies and actions at local level".

The UNEP-WTO considers such national tourism strategies need to be coordinated at minimum with the following policy domains: spatial planning, tax treatment; approval/planning criteria regarding nature and environmental impacts; landscape management, infrastructure availability and quality (public utility services); cultural heritage preservation and promotion; urban and rural development strategies,

knowledge acquisition and dissemination; and (criteria for) state financing of tourism marketing.

As concerns *the third governance feature*, the UNEP-WTO (2005) report recommends that actor-coordination structures be designed across governance scales, because of the inherent extreme dynamism of the tourism sector, and the continuity of policy attention required for managing the fine line between sustainable and unsustainable developments. Cross-scale cooperation is considered also to contribute to a good nation-wide coordination of developments, especially for countries with a considerable degree of decentralization that assume quite large competences in the tourism field at sub-national levels, such as the Netherlands.

The sustainability performances of the national tourism sector depend on:

- the extent and adequacy of policy formulation for tourism development by individual sub-national authorities;
- the extent of horizontal cooperation within sub-national levels of governance;
- the extent and adequacy of cooperation across governance scales (between local, regional, provincial and national administrative actors).

Two aspects are of importance in cross-scale cooperation:

- the integration of tourism policies at national level with those at sub-national levels, based on sustainability principles; or at least monitoring at national level of tourism policy developments at sub-national level;
- cooperation among the other relevant policy domains (such as spatial planning, nature and environmental protection, landscape conservation, infrastructural developments) to map how developments in these domains, at various governance levels may affect tourism; cooperation may be facilitated by policy-making and implementation guidelines, monitoring systems, or policy impact assessments.

The next section answers the first research question of the paper. It discusses how the three selected governance features look like in the Netherlands, which attempts were made to innovate governance based on sustainability principles, and how can these attempts be assessed.

## **4 Developments in the Dutch tourism governance – as assessment**

The domestic tourism sector is important for the Dutch economy. Employment amounts to almost 5 % nationally, while around 3% of total national income comes annually from tourism and recreation. In 2004, incoming tourists spent 8.1 billion € while Dutch people spent 14.4 billion € on domestic tourism and recreation. Spending holidays in the Netherlands is still popular among the Dutch. In 2000-2004, 21%-23% of Dutch people spent holidays in the country, while other 27%-32% had combined holidays spending time both abroad and in the Netherlands (RLG, 2005[a]). Around 10 million foreigners visit the Netherlands annually. In 2004, 38% of the booked accommodation was occupied by foreigners (CBS, 2005).

### **4.1 Policies' and actors' coordination under challenge**

#### *4.1.1 National-level actor structure*

Netherlands has a state secretary responsible for tourism - among others - at the Ministry for Economic Affairs. But the ministry is in practice only interested in incoming

tourism, as (presumably) higher revenue generator. If we are to define tourism as comprising both incoming and domestic (Dutch) tourism, and all kinds of products tourists use, we can argue that the activities of four ministries strongly influence the development of the domestic tourism sector. Their competences across the tourism-relevant policy domains are summarized in Table 1. Commercial actors and knowledge actors have been long criticizing this institutional fragmentation. It has been argued that ministries systematically fail to coordinate strategies, policies and projects that affect the performances of the tourism sector. Large segments of these two actor groups have been calling for a change in this governance structure feature.

Commercial actors have an exclusive economic dimension to their criticism. The policies for tourism products and facilities are split across ministries, resulting in economic inefficiencies. The most disturbing to them is the differentiation of governmental competences and priorities between incoming tourists and domestic tourists. It is argued that an integrated tourism policy is necessary. Such policy should be developed at national level, which ideally requires, in their view, a reshuffling of the current actor structure. For a long time, commercial actors lobbied for a new minister or state secretary responsible exclusively for tourism, as a governmental discussion partner for all aspects and products of tourism.

Ministries	Competences, policy domains
<i>Ministry for Economic Affairs (EZ)</i>	EZ has a State Secretary for tourism concerned only with policy for incoming tourists; main goals: increasing foreign tourists' spending, and generating labour; no national-level tourism policy and planning considered necessary; other tourism-relevant domains: entrepreneurship, small-medium sized companies and innovation.
<i>Ministry for Nature, Agriculture, and Fisheries (LNV)</i>	Competences over the so called "open-air recreation" that actually includes: nature-based recreation and tourism, rural tourism and agro-tourism (to compensate for economic losses in the agricultural sector); other relevant tourism-domains: landscape development, nature-biodiversity conservation.
<i>Ministry for Environmental Protection (VROM)</i>	Permitting for "red-recreation" facilities/activities (not related to water and not located in nature protection areas), such as entertainment/attraction centres; other relevant tourism-domains: spatial planning policies; environmental quality – waters, air, soil; the policy for large cities
<i>Ministry for Transport and Water (V&amp;W)</i>	water-related recreation/tourism, mobility; coastal zone management, waterways and marinas

Table 1. Distribution of ministerial competences of key relevance for tourism.

Knowledge actors defend a multi-dimensional genuine sustainability agenda. They lobby for change in this governance feature by invoking the negative tourism impacts due to the lack of ministerial coordination and overview (see Appendix). But there is no agreement within this group that a minister or state secretary is really needed (Alterra, 2003). Some consider that genuine policy coordination is more important and that this could be realized, for example by means of a cooperation platform with adequate decision-making competences.

#### 4.1.2 *Strategies and policy instruments*

In the Netherlands there is no national strategy for tourism and recreation development; in any case not in the sense defined by UNEP-WTO. The “open-air recreation policies” of the Ministry for nature make no reference to tourism, even when they actually address not only recreation, but also rural and agro-tourism, and accommodation and other tourism facilities located in nature protection areas<sup>1</sup>. The word “recreation” is persistently used by the Ministry of Nature to defend its historical policy domain of nature-based and rural-based activities and facilities, while it actually refers to tourism, to large extent. Likewise, tourism policies make seldom reference to “recreation” facilities and activities because the Economic Affairs Ministry has continuously included in its key policy documents only destinations and facilities most likely to be used by incoming tourists, in the West of the country.

The integration of the “recreation policies” of the Ministry for Nature and of the incoming tourism policies of the Ministry for Economic Affairs has been long defended by both commercial and knowledge actors, as a stepping block towards a genuine national tourism policy. This was backed by some politicians in the Parliament as well. Knowledge actors were however alone in their discourses about a need for a national *sustainable* tourism policy, that should coordinate the current tourism and recreation domains with the environmental, spatial planning, nature, landscape, water, and mobility policy domains, the integrated management of coastal areas, and the policy for large cities (see Appendix).

#### 4.1.3 *Coordination across governance scales*

In the Netherlands, neo-liberal political ideologies have been increasingly embraced by political parties in the last two decades or more, being also increasingly more accepted by some traditional social-democrat parties. Drawing on neo-liberalism, the governance principles of decentralization and deregulation have been implemented across numerous policy domains: tourism, spatial planning, tourism taxes, environmental protection, rural development, landscape management, as well as certain aspects of nature protection and water management, mobility, and infrastructural development.

Under the motto “centrally what is strictly necessary, de-centrally what is possible”, local and regional authorities have received exclusive or key policy-making competences and instruments in these fields. Certain laws were abrogated to allow the exercise of the new sub-national competences. For example, in 2005, the Law for the Permitting of Nature-Based Accommodation for Recreation was abrogated. By January 2008, local authorities are expected to be fully responsible for the permitting requirements for such facilities.

But the interpretations of neo-liberalism in the Netherlands led to the dismantling of the vertical coordination of administrative actors. No *institutional structures or instruments such as guidelines or monitoring systems* have been introduced to check:

- to what extent municipalities have taken over the governmental tasks of formulating policies for tourism, recreation, and all the other relevant policy domains;
- what are the types of products promoted at sub-national levels and their level of intensity, so as to prevent unsustainable developments;
- what are the aggregated impacts of the tourism products developed and promoted by sub-national authorities on the national economy, environment, nature and social-local fabrics.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are: Agenda for a Vital Rural Area, 2004; Valuable Cultural Landscapes, 1994.

Since the legal implementation of the decentralization and deregulation principles of governance, central governmental actors know next to nothing on the policy-making activities on tourism at sub-national levels, and policy impacts on tourism due to decisions at sub-national levels in other policy domains.

## **4.2 Any change in governance features?**

In the last two decades, commercial and knowledge actors engaged in various forms of persuasion before and after elections. They sent letters to political and administrative actors (ministries, the 12 provincial economic departments responsible for tourism/recreation, municipalities, public agencies), organized workshops and used media instruments to explain their governance preference for a single national-level actor, and the integration of tourism and recreation policies. Some also framed their lobby under the principles of sustainable development.

The only outcomes of these persuasion mechanisms were in the form of Several Simple Motions adopted since mid 1990s by the Parliament. The Motions required a closer cooperation between the Ministries for Nature and the Ministry for Economic Affairs, and the adoption of integrated tourism-recreation policies. The Simple Motions were adopted in October 1998, September 2000, and April 2002.

A Simple Motion is nevertheless the weakest constraining mechanism at the disposal of the parliament, because there are no legal consequences when the government or minister(s) refuse to implement it. Governmental actors are obliged to respond before the Parliament; a Simple Motion cannot be ignored. But in answering, the government/ministers may simply state, for example, why the required action/instrument is not necessary in their view. Or it may choose to adopt other measures that the government considers sufficient to address the policy issue at stake. The weakness of this instrument explains why as many as three simple motions had to be adopted, to engender some changes in the governance structure.

### *4.2.1 National-level actor structure*

As a result of the three Simple Motions, the government elected in 2004 decided to set-up a national-level commission on tourism-recreation. In 2005 such a commission started to operate. Four to five times a year, the following actors meet: the ministries for nature, economic affairs, and for the environment and spatial planning; the Association of Provincial Authorities; and the main commercial and non-commercial associations of the sector (van den Velden, 2007; Bos, 2007).

The innovation *on this governance feature can only be seen as symbolic*. The new commission is no more than a platform for informal information exchange. It has no competences to take any form of decision, on any topic. It can only be used in signaling problems, and discussing what actors could be involved in addressing the problem, under the current institutional, legal and policy frameworks. But the commission is unable to activate actors to take measures, or change the frameworks for tourism development, directly. The ministries are not represented by political actors – such as ministers/state secretaries – but by policy workers. Commercial actors and knowledge actors are not satisfied with the competences of this new actor (Hos, 2007; Dijks, 2007; de Jong, 2007; Tap, 2007). They stopped lobbying for a special minister/state secretary (Hos, 2007) but continue to lobby for a new actor in the form of an inter-ministerial commission with genuine decision-making competences.

#### 4.2.2 Strategies and policy instruments

In 2002 the *Tourism-Recreation Action Plan* was jointly presented before the parliament by the ministries for nature and for economic affairs, as a result of the three Simple Motions adopted. A content analysis of this action plan shows, however, that *innovation in this governance feature can only be qualified as symbolic*. The document does not introduce any change in the approach towards the various types of products or tourist markets. There are also no changes in the policy goals, instruments and priorities followed by the two ministries. The ‘new policy’ simply summarizes the policy lines and measures already adopted by the two ministries. Policy measures for the increase of incoming tourism clearly dominate the program. Emphasis is placed on the already adopted policies of Economic Affairs to increase cultural and coastal tourism on the West of the country.

The word ‘sustainability’ appears only in one sub-section of the Action Plan. It is mentioned that the two ministries aim to promote sustainable tourism by means of few (already developed) programs and initiatives supporting biodiversity conservation in the developing countries visited by Dutch tourists. This clearly regards only outgoing tourism, and does not include concern for nature impacts within the Netherlands. The ministries argue that, by means of such initiatives, the Netherlands is a world leader in promoting sustainable, ecologically-responsible, tourism.

The reactions of the two ministries also disappointed some parliament members, knowledge actors, and economic actors, referring to them as ‘window dressing’ (Hos 2007; Tap, 2007; Dijks, 2007; Scherijer-Pierik, 2007). In the next years, separate Policy Declarations were issued by the two ministries: one addressing mainly recreation issues from the Ministry of Nature (“Policy for a Vital Rural Area”, 2004), and one on tourism, from the Ministry of Economic Affairs (“Renewed Tourism Agenda”, 2003). Although the ministries had sometimes presented their policies jointly before their parliament, they continue to promote the same destinations, facilities and products as before.

Concerning coordination with other policy domains, two attempts were made to integrate environmental protection, and nature conservation into the management of tourism-recreation companies and some products. First, there was the program called *Policy Agenda Environment, Tourism and Recreation*, adopted in 1995. The Dutch parliament chose to implement the sustainable development principles formulated at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. For this, a Nature and Environment Plan was adopted by the government, in 1993, where a section was dedicated, for the first time in environmental policies<sup>2</sup>, to the environmental consequences of tourism and recreation activities.

Contrary to the name, this was not a genuine policy document, but rather a collection of 26 projects, bundled in 13 ‘priority themes’, and proposed to be executed by commercial actors or public-private partnerships. No follow up initiatives were included in the Policy Agenda. There was also no monitoring of implementation planned at all. Many projects were actually never implemented (Schaaf, 2007; Brand, 2007). Currently, all traces of the existence of this policy program disappeared. Even the program website was de-activated and numerous actors of all types, interviewed for this research – political, provincial, commercial, NGOs – are unaware that program ever existed. This policy initiative can also be best described as *symbolic innovation*.

The second attempt was made in 2006. The Dutch Parliament decided to implement the agreements made at the 2002 International Conference for Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg. The government adopted in 2003 an Action Program for

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<sup>2</sup> The social and cultural dimensions of sustainability have always been ignored in the Netherlands.

Sustainable Action, in the framework of which a policy program was promised on the theme 'sustainable tourism and recreation'. This was seen by the government as a task for the ministries for nature and for economic affairs. In September 2006 the two ministries presented before the Parliament their *Policy for Sustainable Tourism and Recreation*. This instrument is, however, still not a real policy, with visions, objectives, and a policy theory on how the envisaged measures can reach the objectives. It is much more modest than its 1995 predecessor. It is a collection of five unrelated projects selected for state financing by the two ministers, from a large number of projects proposed by commercial actors.

An analysis of these projects indicates that this policy instrument cannot be seen as more than *symbolic innovation*, as well. The 'policy' does not propose a strategy and clear framework for sustainability in the tourism-recreation sector; there is no spin-off envisaged for the selected projects, and no vision is offered on how these projects support sustainability in the sector's development. Mechanisms for the diffusion of knowledge and experiences generated by the implementation of these five projects are also not envisaged in the policy instrument.

So far no attempts were made for a genuine coordination with any other policy domains, mentioned earlier. A significant development needs to be signaled in the field of spatial planning. After years of political debates, the Dutch parliament voted for a new National Spatial Planning Strategy in 2005. Under the strong influence of neo-liberal political parties, well represented in the government and parliament, the draft that was finally accepted abandons the demand-driven quantitative and qualitative principles of spatial planning for tourism, followed in the previous decades. Spatial planning competences reside now overwhelmingly with provincial and local authorities. Governmental spatial planning was considered a post-war task that has lost its rationale to large extent, under neo-liberal ideologies.

#### 4.2.3 Cooperation across governance scales

In most municipalities, *local political actors do not perceive themselves as policy-makers for tourism*, arguing that "The municipality only plays a facilitating and stimulating role in the areas of recreation and tourism, formulating general frameworks for development". This formulation is strikingly similar to that used by national political actors to justify decentralization and the transfer of tourism policy-making competences to sub-national actors. A study conducted in 2006 showed that, at local level, only 22 % of municipalities have tourism policies/plans and only 37 % cooperate regionally for tourism development and marketing (Tameling, 2006).

At provincial level, although by 2007 all 12 Dutch provinces have framework policies for the economic development of tourism and recreation, only few of them have special administrative structures (departments, units) for tourism and/or recreation (RLG, 2005[a];[b]). Provinces also seldom cooperate with each other. The low number of municipalities engaging in tourism/recreation policy-making suggests that a policy gap emerged under the way the decentralization principle was applied in the Netherlands.

Sustainability literature emphasizes the importance of decentralization for a good management of local resources (Goodin, 1992: 147). But actually the decentralization principle has only been implemented to limited extent in the Netherlands, *de facto*, which accounts for the current gap in tourism policy. In this content there are also no forms of cooperation between the national-level actors and sub-national authorities for the coordination of tourism and recreation development, nor for the coordination of actions in the other relevant policy domains that could have consequences for the sector.

In conclusion, answering the first research question, there have been so far two soft sources of change: a number of parliament Simple Motions, requiring more ministerial

and policy cooperation for tourism and recreation development; and two international treaties promoting sustainable development across national economic sectors. These relatively *weak mechanisms* resulted in limited innovations of the domestic tourism governance, in only two of the three features studied in this paper: a new actor and three new policy instruments for domain coordination (1995; 2002, and 2006). The innovations introduced can only be assessed as symbolic. They are unable to generate improved performances of the domestic tourism sector, neither economically, nor more widely across sustainability dimensions. The EU recommendations and guidelines to Member States for sustainable have played so far no role in the changes observed. They have not been invoked during discourses by political, administrative, commercial and knowledge actors. The next section answers the second research question of the paper, looking at the core factors responsible for the observed limited and symbolic innovations.

## 5 Stakeholders governance preferences for tourism and approaches to sustainable development

This section is based on data from a survey that was returned by 44 stakeholders from various kinds of organizations. The types of actors who returned the questionnaire can be seen in Table 2. It is interesting to look at data first from the perspective of tourism growth desirability and impact perceptions. Respondents were asked to state to what extent they are concerned with the already recorded negative impacts of tourism on nature (fauna and flora) and on the environment (water, soil, air etc). The same questions were asked regarding the expected negative impacts if tourism grows. Respondents also had to state to what extent they view the growth of tourism volumes desirable for future.

on behalf of whom do you fill in this questionnaire \* preference for national tourism policy coordination Crosstabulation

Count		preference for national tourism policy coordination						Total
		a separate ministry for TR	state secretary dedicated to TR only	coordination by only one ministry, both tourism&recreation	permanent interministerial structure	hesitation towards national coordination structure	no national coordination structure	
on behalf of whom do you fill in this questionnaire	political party	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
	ministry	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	public agency	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
	provincial authorities economy	1	0	4	1	0	0	6
	provincial authority nature	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	provincial auth spatial planning	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	association commercial actors	1	3	3	0	1	0	8
	recreation agency	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	consumers association	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
	env/nature NGO	0	0	2	1	1	3	7
	knowledge actors	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
	Total	5	6	13	5	2	6	37

Table 2. Stakeholder preferences for the first governance structure – national level coordination structure.

Some respondents emerged to be generally “protection oriented” in relation to these questions: the NGOs, knowledge actors, the representative of the provincial nature department, and the recreation agency. The other actors are more “growth oriented”.

When we group respondents along these lines there are clear relations with the desired growth of tourism (all following correlations in Spearman's Rho:  $-.684$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=44$ ) and the belief that tourism already had a negative impact on nature ( $.672$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=44$ ) and the environment ( $.514$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=41$ ). The proposition "the Netherlands should maximize the capture of international tourism demand growth" was supported by a majority of 12 strongly agree and 16 agree (7 neutral, 8 disagree, 1 strongly disagree). This 'growth orientation' does not always coincide with optimism about environment and nature, since 23 agreed with the proposition that tourism already had negative impacts on the environment and 20 that this was the case with nature.

Several interesting results emerged regarding the first governance structure feature studied in this paper. While a large majority of stakeholders support the idea of a new national coordination structure (31 in favor, 6 against), the analysis of the survey shows that opinions differ greatly about what kind of national coordination structure would be desirable, if any (seven times no opinion / no answer). There is a clear difference on the preference for this governance feature among the two groups of actors. While 6 out of 7 with a protection orientation prefer the nature ministry (LNV) or the environment and spatial planning ministry (VROM), most of the others preferred the Economic Affairs ministry or none. The answers can be seen in Table 3.

**growth and protection coalitions \* preference for ministerial location of new integrated national-level actor Crosstabulation**

Count		preference for ministerial location of new integrated national-level actor				Total
		at LNV	at VROM	at EZ	other	
growth and protection coalitions	protection	3	3	1	0	7
	growth	0	1	8	2	11
Total		3	4	9	2	18

Table 3. Preferences for the location of a state secretary for tourism.

The "growth oriented" respondents are more inclined to endorse a strong national coordination than the "protection oriented". However, a deeper look at the qualitative empirical information available reveals that most of the actors in the "growth-oriented group" who filled-in strong national coordination as desirable are commercial actors. As already discussed in the previous section, they lobby for a long time for a dedicated ministry and state secretary and prefer a location at the Ministry for Economic Affairs. But commercial actors are not interested with multi-dimensional sustainability, but only with the economic sustainability. They prefer a stronger governmental coordination to help them improve their market position internationally. Data summarized in Table 3 confirm the available qualitative data elicited during in-depth interviews.

In the same vein, data summarized in Table 4 suggests that although some stakeholders are predominantly not really concerned with the future impacts on the environment ("not worried" or "to small extent", they still consider desirable to have a unified national-level actor for tourism development. Looking at the organizations which filled in these answers it appears that most of the actors are again commercial actors and the representatives of "users" (recreation/tourists representatives).

concern with future environmental impacts of TR \* preference for national tourism policy coordination Crosstabulation

Count		preference for national tourism policy coordination						Total
		a separate ministry for TR	state secretary dedicated to TR only	coordination by only one ministry, both tourism&recreation	permanent interministerial structure	hesitation towards national coordination structure	no national coordination structure	
concern with future environmental impacts of TR	to large extent	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
	to moderate extent	0	1	4	3	1	2	11
	to small extent	1	2	4	2	1	4	14
	not worried	4	3	3	0	0	0	10
Total		5	6	13	5	2	6	37

Table 4. Impact concerns and preferences for a national-level actor.

The survey also revealed interested findings regarding the second and third governance structure features studied in this paper. There is quite a high degree of consensus on the primacy of regional / local authority competences for policy-making on tourism-recreation. Of the 44 stakeholders 35 respondents agreed to this (6 of them strongly), 9 were indifferent and only 3 disagreed. But in the same time there is a need for national-level assistance for this. A large majority also agreed with suggestions that the sub-national authorities should be facilitated by the national government in their policy-making activities that are relevant for sustainable tourism development. This support should come in the form of *non-compulsory guidelines* regarding land use planning, environmental permitting and nature protection. Instruments to guide the use of tourism taxation to stimulate the sustainability of tourism were met with far less enthusiasm: while 10 strongly agreed and another 11 agreed, 7 were indifferent, 11 disagreed and 4 disagreed strongly.

More detailed questions were asked regarding the crucial policy domain of planning for tourism development. The suggestion that the sub-national authorities should be supported by *national policy instruments* in order to guide sub-national level policy and planning for the tourism and recreation sector based on sustainability principles was generally endorsed (26 agree, 6 disagree). These answers are completely unrelated with growth and protection orientations. When asked however what kind of policy instruments could be best used for this purpose another picture arises. The possible instruments mentioned were threefold and respondents could tick more than one:

- (a) soft instruments like voluntary agreements and non-compulsory guidelines,
- (b) best practice instruments (like monitoring and benchmarking), and
- (c) direct regulation.

From strong to soft we decided to order: (1) all - 2x, (2) direct and soft - 5x, (3) direct only - 7x, (4) best and soft - 5x, (5) best only - 12x, (6) soft only - 5x. From the answers summarized in Table 5, one can observe that the *relatively weak instruments – best practices, soft instruments - are most popular*.

Instrument combinations with direct regulation instruments involved were supported by *all* representatives of environmental and consumer NGO's and knowledge institutes, 2 of the 8 representatives of the commercial tourism sector, but *none* of the representatives of public government, parties and agencies. Thus this new variable relates also strongly to the "growth or protection orientations": .641, p= .000, n=36, implying that - *for such a sustainability purpose – advocates of a protection orientation towards tourism and recreation support the stronger instruments to guide the sub-national authorities*. The instrument preference also relates to the proposition that there should be national guidance towards sustainability oriented tourism policies: Rho = .502, p= .001, n=36. The cross table is shown below:

*Spatial distribution*

One of the propositions regarding the contents of a possible national sustainable tourism policy was that “State-financed marketing should avoid the promotion of destinations where negative impacts are already recorded”. Opinions were clearly split about this: 19 agreed, 9 neutral and 15 disagreed. However, the relationship one might expect with orientation or environmental concern is absent.

But there is a clear relationship with the instrument preference:  $.458, p=.003, n=35$ . The proposition that central and provincial authorities should develop jointly a vision on land use for tourism met great support: 33 in favor. But the sharper proposition that such a vision should address the distribution and intensity of various forms of tourism and recreation was less supported: 23 in favor, 11 neutral, 10 disagree. Also these answers relate more to instrument preferences than to orientation and environmental concern variables.

**instrument preference recoded \* national support of subnational authorities for sustainable TR policy making Crosstabulation**

Count		national support of subnational authorities for sustainable TR policy making				Total
		strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	
instrument preference recoded	all	0	2	0	0	2
	dir + soft	2	2	1	0	5
	dir	2	5	0	0	7
	best + soft	2	3	0	0	5
	best	0	6	5	1	12
	soft	0	2	3	0	5
Total		6	20	9	1	36

Table 5. Instrument preferences to guide sub-national level tourism policy.

*Indicators*

Propositions arguing in favor of public responsibility for developing sustainability indicators also met great support. In case of environmental impacts 28 agreed, with nature and landscape 30 and with spatial impacts 29 (most of the rest being neutral). When local – social impact are concerned support was clearly less: only 16 in support, 15 neutral and 8 disagreeing. Clearly social cohesion in communities and the like were not seen as relevant as other aspects of sustainability. The first three relate to the concern for present and future tourism impacts on nature (rho’s vary from  $.344$  to  $.490$ ), the local –social one doesn’t. The same holds for the relation with instrument preference (rho’s vary from  $.429$  to  $.590$ ). There is no relationship with preferences regarding national coordination structures.

*Tourism as policy target in environmental policy*

Finally opinions were asked about regarding tourism and recreation companies as a specific target group in environmental policy (15 in favor, 11 neutral 12 disagree) and regarding including more of their facilities in the Environmental Impact Assessment scheme (16 in favor, 13 neutral and 8 disagree). These answers related strongly to one another ( $.640, p=.000, n=35$ ), but not with instrument preference, preferences regarding

national coordination structures. The EIA variable was related weakly to some of the environmental concern indicators.

## 6 Reflections and recommendations

While analyzing the survey's results on the preferred governance structure features it is important to keep in mind that political actors and the four ministries with tourism-relevant competences are actually against changing the current distribution of actor competences at national level and across governance, or to change the policy instruments used. The main governance principles of neo-liberalism defended by most of these actors demand:

- smaller governments – hence no new sector-dedicated ministers/secretaries;
- decentralization – hence tourism policy-making at sub-national levels and
- no monitoring and guidelines for sub-national level policy making in tourism and other relevant policy domains.

The finding that a large majority of actors is in favor of non-compulsory instruments and guidelines - to help sub-national authorities in the areas of tourism policy, land use planning, environmental permitting and nature protection - is very important. Political and public actors often argued during interviews that such policy instruments are not desirable not only because they are impeding the decentralization already introduced; but also because sub-national authorities and commercial actors would not consider these as desirable or necessary. However, most actors in the survey – including some from these categories - agreed with the national-level monitoring of tourism impacts, and national guidelines for policy coordination at sub-national levels.

The fact that most actors who agreed with national-level coordination are in favor of only weak instruments (best practices and soft instruments) raises two possible explanations:

- neo-liberal principles are widely cherished as main governance principles but some extent of voluntary coordination is still acknowledged to have added-value; or/and
- actors do not really know if more direct regulation instruments and stronger central-level coordination would indeed help the cause of promoting sustainable development.

Both of them are very important as they reveal the importance of the lack of knowledge and certainty on how to best address the challenge of sustainability. Literature review and in-depth interviews suggest that the second explanation may play a role for more actors than the first explanation (which mainly pertains to political and public actors). The survey indicated that governance preferences for policy instruments and strategies are not related to the growth/protection types of actors. In-depth interviews with knowledge actors and environmental NGOs also revealed that there are significant differences in the governance preferences defended and the 'policy theories' behind these preferences.

The same argument can be made regarding the preference for or against a unified national-level actor. One should not interpret data in Table 2 as a finding that some the protection-oriented stakeholders regard centralized state governmental interference in general as undesirable. At this stage they are just unsure that more centralization would bring about better prospects of sustainable development. All this suggests that in terms of 'policy theory' for sustainable tourism, opinions are split among, as well as within, the two groups.

The most adequate way forward is to introduce this topic on the discussion agenda between decision-makers and stakeholders of all types. Discussions should address issues such as: Are the UNEP-WTO recommendations adequate governance solutions for sustainable tourism? If not, why not? Are there alternative governance solutions more appropriate for the Netherlands, drawing on de-centralization and soft instruments for guidance and monitoring? Would a decentralized governance structure be able to generate a genuine transition to sustainable development in the domestic tourism sector?

These discussions need input from more policy-oriented research, which has been largely under-financed in the last two decades in the Netherlands. A *wider circulation* of research reports among wider categories of actors is a simple and potentially effective diffusion mechanism. This should be ideally followed shortly by direct interactions among actors in the framework of *workshops and conferences*, where the findings and implications of research studies are discussed, and further knowledge shortages are mapped. These arenas of interaction should be brought into media attention, reporting as well on the studies' findings. Interactions and media attention should also focus on stakeholders' perceptions on who can do what to address the challenges mapped.

The problem is more difficult when it comes to dealing with actors that do not see themselves as policy actors and stakeholders either on sustainability issues, or in the tourism and recreation sector. Actors of all types - political, public, commercial, consumer organizations, nature and environmental management organizations - answered in the survey that they did not read many studies on the negative tourism impacts and governance issues because they found them not relevant for their work.

Actors with such perceptions are likely to continue to ignore old and new studies unless other mechanisms are successful in influencing their motivation to listen. Other actors with power and resources of relevance for them may be activated to influence and persuade them to at least attend the workshops and conferences where they are also asked to reflect on their roles. An important topic for workshops and conferences to start with is actors' responsibilities. A wide diversity of actors needs to acknowledge that they have an impact on the sustainability of tourism and recreation development, and as a result of these impacts they have also responsibilities.

Research studies and discussions in workshops and conferences should be comprehensive and "close the loop" between the various categories of boundary judgments actors generally hold (Dinica, 2007). Research studies, and discussions for their diffusion, need to make clear the analytical links between the current 'policy theory' behind the governance structure, and the negative impacts of tourism and recreation. They also need to improve understanding on how specific governance preferences are most likely to lead to unsustainable developments.

Many political actors do not hold any clear 'policy theory'. They do not think in terms of cause-effect relationships. They hold political ideologies based on which policy instruments are eligible or not for tourism and recreation governance, or other policy domains. But most political actors do not have a clue about the consequences of all policy instruments relevant for the sector's development. The advice of Sandercock seems to be very useful for the Netherlands, as well as other countries facing a similar governance paradigm (1997: 231): "Now that the prospect of a continued, unlimited increase of material wealth has faded, we need more than ever a worked-out conception of the 'good society' – that is, an ideological stand – if we are to discuss policies intelligently."

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## Appendix - Tourism impacts and governance challenges

The domestic tourism sector accounts for almost 5% of employment nationally, and between 3-5% of total national annual income (CBS, 2005). But economic benefits are unequally spread across the twelve Dutch provinces, although the less visited provinces also have rich natural and cultural resources and have ambitions to develop the tourism-recreation sector (Dinica, 2007). The policy of the Ministry for Economic Affairs - responsible for incoming tourism - has focused for decades on the promotion of destinations located mainly in two of the twelve Dutch provinces - in the provinces of South-Holland and North-Holland, especially Amsterdam and the Western coast. Studies show that the environmental impacts from tourism and recreation are the highest in these two provinces, which have the highest density of tourism-recreation facilities and activities. A large tourism resource potential exists across the country, but it is seldom used by foreign tourists.

The following main negative *impacts on environmental and nature resources* have been signalled in various research reports studying impacts across the country<sup>3</sup>.

- Impacts from tourism and recreation related mobility by cars. Between 30 and 50 % of all person-car-kilometres in the Netherlands are accounted to TR mobility. The main impacts are in terms of green house gases, various other air pollutants, lead pollution of soils, noise generation and contribution to fossil fuels consumption.
- Pollution of waters and marine ecosystems due to recreational navigation. The number of Dutch people engaging in water sports increased significantly in the last two decades and is three times higher than that of foreign tourists.
- Disturbance and pollution in nature areas, such as inland forests, heath, dunes. Nature-based leisure is held (co-)responsible for: loss/fragmentation of habitat in nature areas, disturbance of bird breeding and wildlife, land erosion, damage to vegetation with role in dune stabilization and hence dune erosion, path formation in ecologically sensitive areas and path erosion contributing again to dune erosion.
- Pressure on coastal areas and islands with fragile ecosystems and limited resources. The Western Dutch coast is one of the most used tourism resource since the 1950s. Both environmental and economic degradation have taken hold of many sites along the coast.
- Pressure on urban infrastructures and resources: wastewaters and solid wastes' collection and processing; energy consumptions, road infrastructures. Many municipalities have been taken by surprise by the surge in tourism in the last two decades, being confronted with the management of infrastructures that prove, in hindsight, to have been under-dimensioned. For example, in the Province of Zeeland, the uncontrolled expansion of accommodation facilities in nature areas and rural areas lead to the overload of wastewater infrastructure by 50 % of the maximum design capacity, followed by water pollution.

Interviews with stakeholders indicate that there are no scenarios for the environmental and nature consequences of the expected significant growth in demand for tourism-recreation in coming decades. So far, no studies have been carried-out at the destination or provincial level regarding the pressure tourism-recreation exerts on environmental and natural resources.

From this discussion, a series of governance challenges emerge in terms of *integration/coordination of tourism policy with other policy domains*: day-recreation

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<sup>3</sup> Dinica (2007) offers a more detailed discussion of the negative impacts and the main types of visitors and activities contributing to them.

policies; spatial planning policies; nature conservation policies; environmental protection policies; water management policies; transport and mobility policies; integrated coastal zone management, policies for large cities. And since competences across these policy domains are spread across ministries and national-level agencies, as well as across governance scales, actor coordination becomes important in any attempt to innovate governance for sustainability. This indicates the importance of the three governance structure features that will be discussed in the paper (based on Bressers and Kuks, 2004).