

Intra-Party Democracy in Groningen Early in the 1970s

– decision making process within the labour party concerning
the traffic circulation plan –

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December 2005**

**Urban and Regional Studies Institute
Research Report 310**

Abstract

The city of Groningen introduced the traffic circulation plan (*Verkeerscirculatieplan*, VCP) in 1977. While this plan has created a pedestrian-friendly inner city, it has been severely criticised because of the lack of public participation in the planning process. However, if we define representative democracy as, neither responsive nor participatory, but responsible governance, more public participation does not necessarily contribute to democracy. With this definition, it is a very sensitive issue how to integrate public opinion. This paper will focus on the role that political parties can play in representing public opinion. The new left politicians, who took the initiative in introducing the VCP, advocated thorough democratisation of their own party, in which party members could directly participate in party policy making. This paper will analyse how this intra-party democracy was realised in the planning of the VCP. Although party members could not directly participate in the planning, it will be concluded, the public as a whole as well as party members could influence the plan through creating formal and informal frameworks for party leaders.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Traffic circulation plan	1
1.2 Intra-party democracy	2
2. District team	4
2.1 Vacillating purposes	4
2.2 Difficulties	6
2.3 Activities	9
2.4 VCP	11
3. Working group	14
3.1 Working group Urban Planning	14
3.2 Relationship with party leaders	15
3.3 VCP	16
4. General member meeting	18
4.1 Political discussion	18
4.2 VCP	20
5. Framework for party policy making	22
5.1 Election programme	22
5.2 Informal framework	24
5.3 Party discipline	25
6. Conclusion	27
Notes	28

List of abbreviation

B&W: *college van burgemeester en wethouders*

DTC: district team council, *wijkteamraad*

GMM: general member meeting, *ledenvergadering*

PvdA: *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party)

VCP: *Verkeerscirculatieplan* (Traffic Circulation Plan)

List of Figures

Figure 1: Traffic circulation plan of Groningen

Figure 2: Main bicycle routes

List of Tables

Table 1: Activities of district teams

Table 2: General member meeting in 1974-75

1. Introduction

1.1 Traffic circulation plan

The city of Groningen (population 180, 747¹) introduced the traffic circulation plan (*Verkeerscirculatieplan*, VCP) in September 1977. In order to keep out through traffic, this plan divided the inner city into four sectors by enforcing one-way traffic restrictions overall (Figure 1). Drivers had to go out to a ring road surrounding the inner-city to move from one sector to another. As a result, car traffic was cut by half, and the plan has created the possibility for urban design for pedestrians (not least as consumers), although it was criticised as "devastating", "catastrophic", or "fatal" by business organisations before its introduction.

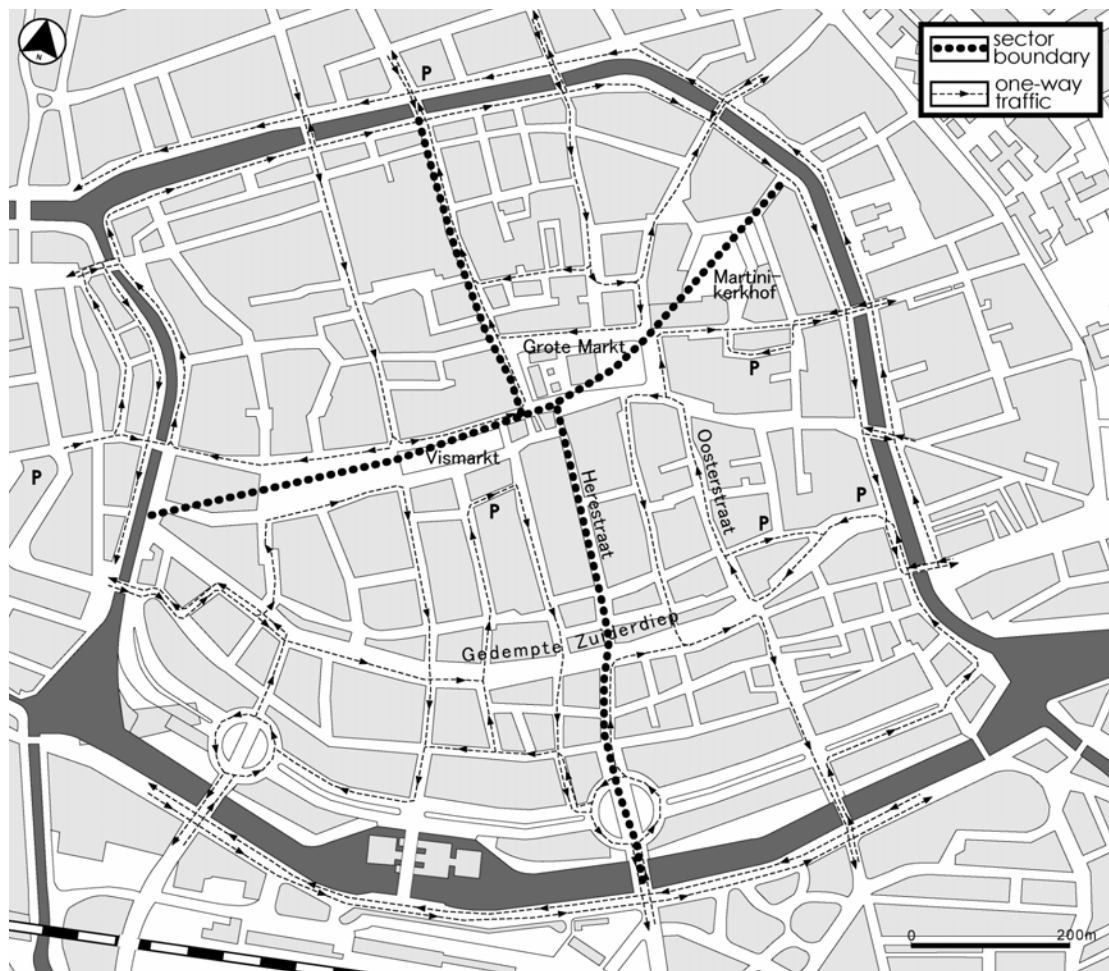


Figure 1: Traffic circulation plan of Groningen

One of the reasons for such huge criticism, which even now can be heard vividly, lies in the decision-making process. The first interim report was published in February 1975, the second report, the VCP Part II, in May, and the final plan was not published but revealed in July². Until this moment, there was literally no opportunity for the public to participate. This plan tried to expand the pedestrian area enormously.

Tremendous opposition emerged from among business and commercial circles, and the municipality modified it in just "14 days". Again there was no participation. The result was the "sector-plan". The first and last "information evenings" were held for business people on September 5th, and for residents the next day. The plan was proposed to the municipal council on September 15th, and decided on 17th³.

This "public" process of the VCP has already been described in detail by Tsubohara (2003)⁴. In an attempt to widen the perspective of the planning process, this paper will focus on the "intra-party" process of the VCP. That is, the decision-making process within the labour party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) of Groningen. The PvdA has been the biggest party in Groningen since its establishment after the World War II, and as a result of the local election in May 1974, it boasted the most council seats in history, 18 out of 39 in total, when the VCP was decided. At this election, it obtained a dominating 40.4% of the vote. The responsible *wethouder* (political executive) for urban planning was Max van den Berg, who was placed in the top position in the candidate list of the local PvdA. The public could not participate directly in the planning process of the VCP. This paper will examine whether the public could influence the VCP through the intra-party process. The analysis will not be limited to the process of the VCP, but also investigate institutional or ideological contexts, which must have conditioned party-policy making in those days.

1.2 Intra-party democracy

The young new left activists of the PvdA, who emerged in the middle of the 1960s, advocated thorough "democratisation" of their own party as well as society as a whole. In order to realise this, according to the new left, rank-and-file party members had to be able to participate in party-policy making directly, while the public had to be able to participate in public decision-making process. In the Groningen federation of the PvdA, the new left gradually acquired the posts of the federation executive (*bestuur*), and the executive meeting on April 29th, 1968, decided to design "a new approach" for the federation. The goal was to facilitate participation of party members at the division level as well as at the federation level⁵. Van den Berg, who was chairman of the division IV, described this new approach in an article titled "Political Protest through Political Participation" in the local party bulletin, *Onze Binding*:

Political participation is for us by no means a convenient fashionable slogan. (...) We want deliberately to give party members great influence on the policy. (...) Direct influence on the policy: the working groups will be organised in the coming season over actual local problems (education, culture, urban structure, youth policy, public transport), in which all interested can participate with the councillor working in each field. (...) Direct influence on the policy: a councillor attends every general member meeting for a "HALF AN HOUR" city of Groningen problem. (...) THE PARTY MEMBERS DECIDE THE POLICY OF OUR PARTY, on the base of which our members in the local council handle and on the base of which our *wethouders* try to pursue the city policy.⁶

As a result of the motion by Jacques Wallage at the federation general member meeting,

the working group Electorate Contact was established, which was in charge of proposing "ways for improving the municipal democracy". It issued its recommendation in December 1968. Among the ideas:

- involving more party members and those interested in political work through introducing working groups.
- setting up the "district system" in which each councillor has to pay special attention to his or her own district.

As can be seen in the above quotations, the new left had mainly three media in mind to facilitate intra-party participation. That is, district teams (*wijkteams*), working groups (*werkgroepen*) and general member meetings (*ledenvergaderingen*). Through these media, every party member participates substantially in political discussion, and creates party policy. This was the socialist democratic ideal for them. Was it realised? The following will examine one by one how these worked, first in general until the middle of the 1970s and then particularly in the planning of the VCP. Finally, this paper will consider the influence, if any, of the public as well as party members on the PvdA planning policy.

The analysis is mainly based on investigating party materials, most of which are kept at the Groningen division of the PvdA, and local newspapers.⁷

2. District team

The four divisions, which together constituted the Groningen federation of the PvdA, were united into one division in December 1970. This new division became the biggest among the PvdA divisions in the Netherlands, with about 2,000 members. The resulting necessity to bridge the widened distance between party leaders and members was the direct motivation for launching district teams.

Just after the local election in June 1970, which sent many young new left into the council, each PvdA councillor⁸ was allocated to one or two districts as "district councillor (*wijkraadslid*)". The Binding of September 1970 publicised which councillors were responsible for which districts. The division executive members were also allocated to districts. For this purpose, they were intentionally chosen so that they lived in various parts of the city.

In February 1971, the newly appointed party group (*fractie*) leader, Wallage, sent a "memo" to (district) councillors, calling for setting up district teams:

the districts were divided. (...) The following step must be in my opinion: to form district teams.

The task of these teams is twofold:

1. The team helps the councillor to trace typical neighbourhood problems. It is often at first glance odd jobs that are brought about: dangerous crossings, lack of opportunities for playing, complaints about garbage collection, etc. But I think it is very important that people, in this way, recognise that councillors are willing to dedicate themselves for them. (...)

2. The district team can also help people with private (social) problems to come into contact with the councillor. That is why it is important that party members who know many people in the neighbourhood participate in teams

(...) The councillors are also urged to start to form their district teams this month! One can do it at random with the help of friends and acquaintances. One can also invite for a meeting all party members in the district and organise a team.

Despite the "difficult start"⁹, district teams were organised in all but one district¹⁰ by 1972. There were 15 teams in 1973, and the party annual report (*jaarverslag*) 1974/75¹¹ proclaimed that "it was now impossible to imagine the Groningen division without them".

2.1 Vacillating purposes

Although the PvdA district teams, at least a few of them, had kept on working until the middle of the 1990s, their purposes or expected functions had consistently changed, and the resulting vagueness of purposes had been, almost through all the history of district teams, sources of annoyances for both party leaders and team members. This vacillation of purposes can be recognised even for the short period of the 1970s. According to the recommendation of the working group Electorate Contract or the memo by Wallage, councillors were intended to play a central role in the district system, and the role of team members was to help them. The Binding of October 1970,

which called for the participation in the district teams, also explained the role of team members as follows:

In order to make this system work well, we need those who can support the councillor. Their task will be to follow problems in the district, including personal problems, and point them out to the councillor.

These documents also showed that the focus of attention lay exclusively in districts. However, based on one year's experience, Wallage subtly changed the functions of district teams in a letter which was addressed to (district) councillors, (district) executive members and district team members in February 1972. While he indicated the importance for councillors of raising neighbourhood issues in the council, he told, perhaps, not party leaders but team members to "consider also national politics". But the focus still remained in districts, because he followed by saying, "Various cutbacks in public spending have results, also in your district!". In addition, this advice was mentioned in "6c" in seven pieces of advice in total.

However, the Binding of September 1972 describes district teams as more independent and active organisations centred on rank-and-file members, saying, "Your district teams (...) make it possible that all party members, who want it, can actively run politics and take part in the policy decision of the PvdA." The same Binding reports that "various difficulties have surfaced" with district teams, and, as one of those difficulties, poses "the question whether district teams can actively engage themselves in national and regional politics".

In response to these difficulties, the Binding of March 1973 announced "some starting points for the function of district teams within the Groningen division of the PvdA". Without mentioning the role of councillors at all, district teams are more clearly defined as autonomous member organisations:

District teams are formed by party members who show the willingness to be actively engaged in:

1. problems in various fields in their own district mainly from the political point of view of our party.
2. applying more general political point of view of our party, national as well as provincial, to the concrete situation in the district.

Party leaders still stick to the level of districts even in the national and provincial politics. These politics are, however, treated here as equals to neighbourhood problems. Less than one year later, in January 1974, the division executive proposed the "Definition of Standpoint over the purposes of the district teams". After discussions with district teams, this proposal was accepted the same year, and applied or, at least, quoted for several years. The purposes of district teams were defined as follows:

District teams consist of party members who are engaged in:

1. picking up problems in the district, and trying to deal with them; in this area the cooperation with other groups in the district will be often possible and desirable,
2. following critically the municipal policy which is related to the district, and, if necessary, acting correctively,

3. fulfilling a certain degree of ombudsman function in the district, with emphasis on referring citizens to means of help, information, etc.,
4. more general matters in the field of municipal, regional, national and international politics; this can mean both that the district team formulates its own opinions and let them known in the party, and that the district team examines the information and points of view of the party and make its own,
5. expressing the activism of the party by active participation when it organises various actions,
6. basic organisation work for the party: spreading fliers, visiting new party members, strengthening the connection between members, recruiting new members.

These six purposes or functions were categorised later into three, that is, "party in the district" (1, 2 and 3 in the above quotation), "opinion forming organ" (4) and "implementation organ" (5 and 6). The district teams had actually functioned as "implementation organ" from the beginning. On the other hand, the "opinion forming organ" was a newly added function. District teams had to examine general political problems, which were not directly related to their own districts, in addition to "typical neighbourhood problems".

In 1978, the division again started the re-definition of district teams. One of the district teams¹² submitted a paper to the executive, asking for the discussion of "purposes, functions, organisation and receptivity" of district teams, and this led to the establishment of the Committee District Teams. This committee submitted a final report in January 1979, which included 19 suggestions concerning purposes or workings of district teams. District teams were quickly established. However, party leaders kept on groping their way toward the appropriate functions of those teams.

2.2 Difficulties

As long as there was no sustainable consensus on purposes among party leaders, neither the party group nor the division executive organisationally supported district teams, although councillors and executive members together ought to have formed "the kernel of a district team". It was repeatedly pointed out that the link between party leaders and district teams was weak, that teams could not get information timely, and that councillors did not answer questions or demands raised by teams quickly.

Among the "various difficulties" posed in the Binding of September 1972, there were also "the contact between a district team and a district councillor" and "unclearness over the link between a district team and the division executive". As a medium to solve these problems, the district team council (*wijkteamraad*, DTC) was established in October 1972. This was to be held, in principle, monthly, and a few councillors, a few executive members and representatives from all the district teams were to attend and discuss or exchange information. A district team coordinator (*wijkteamcoördinatie*) was simultaneously appointed. Since December 1973, the description letter (*beschrijvingsbrief*) had been sent to each district team a week before the DTC meeting. This letter included the agenda for the next DTC meeting, minutes of the last DTC

meeting, notices and information from the party group and executive, and so on. In addition, a contact person (*contactpersoon*) was appointed within each district team, who was to attend the DTC meeting as representative of the team.

Perhaps thanks to these measures, the party annual report 1972/73¹³ states that "evident improvements emerged in the contact between district teams, the division executive and the party group". However, the same report concedes that "unfortunately the attendance of executive members and councillors at the district team meetings could not always be realised because of the lack of time." A few executive members and councillors did attend the DTC meetings, but they did not necessarily attend appointed district team meetings.

The description letter of September 1974 included the analysis of "the state of affairs in various district teams" in terms of purposes listed in the Definition of Standpoint. As can be seen below, the flow of information was not still improved even after introducing various measures:

It is naturally very dependent on information which a district team can use to follow critically the municipal policy that concerns the district and to engage itself in more general matters in the field of municipal, regional, national and international politics. This information has been, even after the appearance of the district team description letter, too often lacking until now.

The historical victory of the local election in May increased considerably the PvdA councillors from 13 to 18. With this expanded party group, according to this description letter, the councillors had to be able to visit district team meetings more frequently, and the party group had to inform district teams more often, specifically and timely.

However, the description letter of October includes a report from the district team Helpman-Oost, which complains that "it is still a bit awkward to get information from the party group and executive. It is very uncomfortable that something happens in the district, like buildings are constructed, of which the team knows nothing." The relationship between party leaders and district teams seems to get even worse. The description letter of April 1975 shows that the party leaders had complaints about district teams, while district teams doubted the sincerity of party leaders:

the cooperation between district teams and party group- and executive members does not go well: still at the last district team council meetings, some district teams complained that problems are too long left in the party group or are completely brushed aside, while the party group often has to observe that district teams prepare various matters too carelessly.

At the DTC meeting in April 1975, a "black list of problems" was shown to party leaders. These were problems "which were raised to the party group by the district team council or district teams, but on which no reaction has been heard until now". Some of them might have been indeed "odd jobs", like "trees in Zuiderpark threaten to die out", "expansion of side-walks", "playgrounds on the Strausslaan en Shubertlaan",

and so on. But it ought to have been, at least in the beginning, the job of (district) councillors to deal with these problems seriously.

Although the annual report 1974/75 emphasised the importance of district teams within the division, it recognised that "specific information did not reach district teams and working groups appropriately in a systematic way". According to this report, the flow of information is "to a high extent dependent on accident". All the district teams did not always attend the DTC, which was intended to be a place to exchange information. Moreover, the description letter of August 1976 reports, summarising the last season, that the frequent alternation of coordinators made it difficult to hold the DTC meetings and publish the description letters regularly.

Because of the lack of a clear understanding of purposes, party leaders could not state concretely how district teams should deal with other existing or newly organised residential groups in the same districts. Particularly when the municipality, whose *B&W* (*college van burgemeester en wethouders*, political executive office¹⁴) consisted of left wing parties including the PvdA, began to set up district councils (*wijkraden*) in 1973, the annoyances increased among district team members. The Definition of Standpoint just said that the cooperation would be possible and desirable. As a result, each district team took various attitudes towards these groups.

concerning the district team Centrum, many members are active in neighbourhood committees. The state of affairs in various neighbourhood groups are spoken briefly at each district team meeting. Other district teams deal separately with the same problems in which neighbourhood groups have already been engaged for a long time. In contrast, the district team Oosterpoort finds that it is no longer necessary for a district team to engage itself in neighbourhood problems, because there is a district council in the district.¹⁵

The ambiguous functions of district teams and resulting problems were naturally formidable obstacles for recruiting and keeping participants in district teams. Again it had been a consistent problem that participants in district teams were few or that a turnover of participants was constant. It was "difficult start" because it was difficult to find those party members who were interested in district teams in some areas¹⁶. Indeed most of districts could organise teams by 1972, but the Binding of November 1973 posed the understaffing and turnover as one of problems facing district teams. In response to these difficulties, the division executive proposed the Definition of Standpoint. However, this did not lead to an increase in participants. According to the annual report 1974/75, five district teams among 18 in total did not or hardly function. The description letter of February 1976 included a report of an inquiry into district teams. Its title was "Malaise in the district teams". This report, which was written by a district team coordinator, describes the serious situations in which district teams were placed:

Almost all the district teams struggle with serious lack of active members. About half of the district teams consist of no more than 2 to 3 active members. A situation in which we cannot or hardly talk about a district team.

Its conclusion was pessimistic, saying, "The source of problems is simple: lack of active participation. The solution is more difficult".

2.3 Activities

As expected, district teams had difficulties in developing their activities. In terms of the six functions listed in the Definition of Standpoint, the annual report 1975/76¹⁷ concludes that "no district team meets the full implementation of all the posted tasks". However, they had been essential party organisations as "implementation organ" from the beginning, particularly in election campaigns. Moreover, they did not settle with mere campaign organisations. Concerning 1 and 2 of the "party in the district" function, they were rather energetically engaged in neighbourhood problems, in some cases criticising the municipality. Table 1 is a summary of "the state of affairs in the district teams", which was included in the description letter of November 1974.

<p>Centrum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the district team has active connections with the neighbourhood committees Eiland, Inner City-East, Hortus-East, and the neighbourhood committee Inner City-West (being organised).- the Policy Plan of the B&W will be dealt with by the district team.- call for attention to the parking problem in the district: the inner city residents must pay much more. <p>Lewenburg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the district team starts soon the inquiry under neighbourhood residents.- contact is made with the <i>wethouder</i> of education about the school situation in the district.- a letter is sent to the B&W about the traffic situation in the district.- concerning the Policy Plan, the district team submit opinions about school situation, traffic safety, furnishing of the Bakboordswal, district centre and recreation sport. <p>Paddepoel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- a concept letter to minister Vorrink (environment and sanitation), which is about noise nuisance which the Northern Ring Road will cause, will be spoken with district teams of Selwerd, Vinkhuizen, Schilderswijk and Zeeheldenwijk.- the traffic and parking situation around the newly built swimming pool and the sports hall.- the following were submitted as opinions about the Policy Plan: recreation plan along the Reitdiep, funds for investigation into facilities to prevent noise nuisance by the Western and Northern Ring Road, traffic calming facilities to or along the Zonnelaan. <p>Korrewegwijk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- situation about Deliplein. <p>Selwerd</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the district team has promised its support to the parents' committee, which takes action against the traffic situation on the Iepenlaan, and particularly suggested to propose to place boards along the street, saying 'less speed – children are worth it', or to introduce the advisory speed limit of, for example, 40 km per hour.- the district team talks with the district team Paddepoel about the traffic situation on November 25th.- all party members in the district will be informed regularly of the doings of the district team. <p>Vinkhuizen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- situation about the swimming pool Hoogkerk.- the principle programme and also the Policy Plan will be handled. <p>Helpman-Oost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the district team will meet on November 18th to talk about the place and function within the district and the division. It will be agreed if the activities will lie mainly in the general political
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(Table 1)

aspect, or that the district team will acquire the function of a sort of district council.

De Wijert

- the district team will consult with Helpman-Oost regularly about the problem of Helpman.
- the contact with councillors and executive members go excellently.

Corpus den Hoorn

- the district team gathered a little bit before for the first time after long summer pause. It spoke only the plan to change the route of the bus line 3. The district team supports this because it will realise a much better link with the market. It has consulted about this with Zeeheldenwijk and Laanhuizen/Gruno and with a group of councillors.

(Helpman-Oost/ de Wijert/ Corpus den Hoorn)

- The district teams in the southern districts cooperate at the moment very well for an important matter, that is, to realise a multifunctional meeting place for the whole Groningen-south. Various members will inquire into existing and planned facilities at various municipal and other institutions, and publish a report at the next joint district team meeting.

Laanhuizen/Gruno

- the district team will talk about the Policy Plan on November 19th.
- the contact with the executive member is very intensive. The councillor attends all the meetings.
- the district team wants the answer from the party group to their demand for opening the rear entrance of the Stadspark.
- the team also deals with the bus plan intensively.

Schilderswijk

- the place and function of the district team is spoken on November 19th.
- the district team wants to talk with the councillor about the state of affairs of the plan Mesdagplein.
- there has been little contact with councillors and executive members till now.

Hoogkerk

- Hoogkerk dedicate special meetings to the Policy Plan on November 12th and 19th.
- the team has recently remarkably expanded and man expects ultimately a fixed core of about 15 to be formed.
- the contact with the councillor goes excellently. The consultation with the executive member will be still expanded.

Zeeheldenwijk

- the relationship between the district team and the neighbourhood group was talked at the last meeting.
- all the party members were a little bit before visited, and got a stencil about the district team.
- the contact with the councillor and executive member has not been still realised at all.

Herewegwijk

- a discussion evening was held between party members of the district council Davidstraat, the district team and some councillors.
- the district team will meet to talk about the Policy Plan.
- there has been still little contact with the executive member, but there has been a consultation with the councillor.
- recently some party members have joined in the district team.

Oosterpoort

- the Policy Plan is spoken on November 18th.
- all the party members were visited and inquired into their satisfaction with the party and municipality.
- there is a good relationship with the councillor and executive member.

Table 1: Activities of district teams

As can be seen in this table, many district teams were rather autonomously engaged in not only various typical neighbourhood problems, such as the lack of playgrounds or traffic safety, but also city-wide projects and plans, like the Ring Road or the Policy

Plan, although it was in terms of their influences on their own districts. Furthermore, in some cases, they cooperated with each other or even with other neighbourhood groups. There were in fact some district teams that could not function because of the lack of participants. However, the number of participants in total had increased from "more than sixty people"¹⁸ in 1972 to about 180 in 1976. Although the party group and the executive were not necessarily cooperative, and the evaluation by the executive was as a whole negative, the district teams had worked actively at least until the middle of the 1970s. However, for district teams to be active is one thing, for them to participate in party policy making is another. The latter ought to have been the most fundamental purpose for introducing the district system. As expected from the fact that information did not reach district teams in a timely way, they could not necessarily systematically participate in party policy making. This can be particularly clearly recognised in the planning process of the VCP.

2.4 VCP

At the DTC, the VCP was for the first time talked about on May 21st, 1975. A description letter was as usual sent to each district team in advance. However, the VCP is not on the agenda in this letter, although the bus plan "ring line" (*kringlijn*) and "Bicycle Plan" are separately listed as the subject of discussion, and, concerning the Bicycle Plan, a rather precise report is attached. *Wethouder* Max van den Berg attended this DTC meeting, while the district team Centrum, which covers the most controversial inner-city, did not attend. The June description letter reports the "discussion" of the VCP as follows:

An information meeting on the Part II of the traffic circulation plan (report with desirable routes for all sorts of transportation) is scheduled for 2:00 to 5:00 on Saturday, May 31st in the Tehuis. In the middle of July the Part III of the traffic circulation plan is published, in which more concrete measures will be written. In September the municipal council will decide these things. Try to keep on following these things per district team, particularly concerning your own district, and tell opinions as soon as possible to the district team councillor!

That is, the VCP was not discussed at the DTC meeting in May. Only its schedule was given as information. Part II was published the next day, on May 22nd. The B&W picked up two projects from this plan, and tried to apply to them the national relief programme for the unemployed. This attempt was strongly criticised by a citizens' group Working Group Inner City as well as a business community for its hasty schedule, in which the municipal council would decide on July 2nd. Although the B&W gave up this attempt after all, this issue around the relief programme was not discussed at all at the DTC meeting, either. Instead, the ring line and Bicycle Plan were widely discussed. It was agreed, according to the description letter, that each district team would examine these two plans and submit opinions in writing. In addition, the description letter encourages the discussion of these two topics by adding the following "remark":

concerning agenda 3 and 4: let some district team members specifically look after themes like these
– the state of affairs can be talked over per theme at every district team meeting; more efficient

work will be possible through such divisions of tasks; try also to involve in the district team work those members who are still not active through concrete matters like this!

The agenda 2, the VCP, is not the subject of encouragement.

This description letter, which was issued for the DTC on June 18th, listed the VCP as one of agendas. However, according to the explanation of this topic, the VCP was not scheduled to be discussed at the DTC, nor did the explanation encourage discussion and preparation in advance:

As known, the Part III of the traffic circulation plan is published in the middle of July, with more concrete proposals about the development of the traffic in our city. In September the municipal council decides these things. Keep informed yourselves (the documents are available in the Binnenstadswinkel and the Stadgershuis), particularly also of the plans for your own district; make contact with the district team councillor in the case of remarks, suggestions, and so on.

In contrast to the Bicycle Plan, for which the explanation encourages to "try to work out these things for your own district".

While the VCP was not discussed at the DTC, Part III was revealed by the police on July 26th, by the free local paper, De Groninger Gezinsbode, on August 4th, modified for "14 days", and the B&W decided upon this modified plan on August 22nd. This plan was decided by the general member meeting of the PvdA on August 26th, and the VCP re-emerged in the description letter, which was intended for the DTC on September 9th. Now that the general member meeting accepted this plan, the next DTC meeting was not any more intended to be the place to discuss its content. In the explanation of the VCP, after pronouncing that the general meeting supported the VCP, the letter points out the fact that "the general member meeting also decided that the party would go to the public with this plan". So, "we will have to tell the public why our party has supported this plan". For the coming municipal council meeting, where the VCP would be proposed, "we will have to consider at the district team council meeting to put a brochure into the post box in the greater part of the city." The letter closes the explanation by saying, "For this the help from district teams is necessary".

At the DTC meeting on September 9th, councillor Peter Drenth concedes that "the VCP was not dealt with thoroughly in every district team", while he praises the plan as "the golden mean". Furthermore, he says that it is a "laugh if just the district team Centrum says it has not been able to talk about it". The district teams Selwerd and Paddepoel fear that, as a result of the VCP, the Northern Ring Road would be constructed without enough measures against pollution, and refuse to spread leaflets about the VCP.

The district team Centrum made contact with the Working Group Inner City in 1973, and supported its idea of making the Grote Markt car-free. At the team meeting on December 6th, it was agreed that it cooperated with the citizens' group to realise this

idea. However, it did not examine at all the VCP itself, in which the street bordering the Grote Markt to the south was to be made car-free. In 1975, it held meetings from January to July every month. Traffic-related matters, like the ring line, the Bicycle Plan or the parking problem for residents, were often raised on its agenda. Concerning the VCP, the meeting on March 25th decided to hold "a special district team meeting about parking, interim report and traffic circulation plan" in May. However, the meeting in May dealt with none of these topics. Without discussing the VCP, the team broke up for the summer holidays, and restarted on September 8th, that is after the general member meeting. The VCP was not discussed there either.

So, not "if" but as a matter of fact, the process was a "laugh". District teams were placed utterly in the same circumstances as the public and other organisations in terms of direct participation in the planning process of the VCP. They were just mobilised to propagate the plan after the decision had been made, as the annual report 1974/75 confirms that "the division executive, together with the working group and district teams, propagated actively to the public the policy of our party concerning the traffic circulation plan."

3. Working group

3.1 Working group Urban Planning

The effort to establish working groups started as early as late in the 1960s. According to the annual report 1968/69¹⁹, the working group Socialist Municipal Politics "has already progressed very far ". However, other groups were in "a very premature stage", and this report points out the necessity of making the procedure that called working groups into being more formalised.

The new division, into which four existing divisions were united in 1970, was at first engaged in launching district teams. After "it was almost finished", the Binding of September 1971 announced that the party would tackle "another possibility to strengthen the democratic character of the party", that is working groups. The expected functions of the working groups were either to respond to the requests for advice from the party group or to examine various problems on their own initiative:

It is possible and probable that the working groups are consulted about concrete problems by councillors, for which they must look for an answer which is helpful for the councillors. However, in addition, working groups will also have to study their problems for themselves, determine for themselves what is important or not in our decision making and political positions.

This Binding proposed nine working groups in total, each of which had its own research topics, and called for participation by party members, attaching a separate application form with check boxes of working groups. For the working group "Urban Development, Public Housing; Traffic, Public Transport", it listed the following topics as examples:

Roads and green space. The car out of the inner city? City busses – where and how expensive? The next new neighbourhood. Housing and working separated? Old neighbourhoods destroyed? How can we realise affordable housing?

Like the district teams, working groups went through a difficult start, and they took more time to organise than expected. The important problem was, according to the Binding of December 1971, the suitable relationship between working groups, the division executive and party group, again the same as the district teams. However, the above example of working group, whose field was urban planning, was very quick to start, and maintained its activity at least until the middle of the 1970s. The Binding of November 1971 already reported that "the working groups Urban Development etc. and Culture have already long existed, and have now grown to big organs". The party annual report 1970/71²⁰ also reported that "The working groups Culture and Urban Planning (*Stedebouw*) held substantially attended meetings regularly." The following is from the annual report 1974/75:

Urban Planning (*Stedebouw*)/ This working group consisted of 21 members. The subjects were, among others, bus line net, taxi plan, the Interim Report, bicycle plan.

For the Bicycle Plan, this working group organised the subgroup Bicycle. As seen

earlier, asking for opinions from district teams, this subgroup published a report with 17 pages, *Towards Better Bicycle Facilities in Groningen*, in June 1975. This report listed the following advantages of bicycles, insisted that these weighed much more than their disadvantages, and proclaimed that this group chose bicycles and public transport as the most important traffic vehicles in the city.

1. the bicycle occupies only a small traffic space (...).
2. the bicycle takes less parking space. (...).
3. the facilities for bicycle transport are much cheaper than those for the car (...).
4. the bicycle has, in a way, high traffic safety (...).
5. the bicycle is a traffic vehicle that is accessible to everyone, the young and old, the rich and poor, an important social aspect!
6. the cyclist is friendly to his environment. (...)
7. the bicycle is sportive and healthy. (...)
8. the bicycle has hardly parking problems, in contrast to the car.
9. the cyclist uses no fuel, which is an advantage from the point of view of saving energy.

It proposed policies for bicycles at three levels, that is "simple measures", "more fundamental measures" and "city plans". At the level of the simple measures, it proposed, for example, the adjustment of the traffic lights. The phasing of traffic lights, which is adjusted to the car, should be re-adjusted to the bicycle. Even if this will cause delay for car traffic, "We think that this, particularly in the inner city, has to be no problem." Concerning one-way traffic restrictions, which were applied to the bicycle as well as the car, this report insisted on their abolition for the bicycle. The group held a survey of residents in some neighbourhoods, and among 113 respondents, the report states, 75 percent supported the experiment in two-way traffic for bicycles. The group, in addition, asked some municipalities, which had already repealed the one-way traffic for bicycles, and argues, in the report, that the decline of traffic safety was not confirmed anywhere.

As one of more fundamental measures, the report proposes the "main bicycle routes" (Figure 2), saying, "bicycle routes of high quality have to be made between neighbourhoods, the inner city, employment centres and other objects attracting traffic". Finally, in city planning, "the distance, which workers, vacationers, shoppers, and so on must traverse, has to be small so that this can be moved by bicycle in a reasonable way", and the report opposes residential or commercial developments in suburban areas. Although it was pointed out that "all the group members are short of free time"²¹, this working group seems to have been engaged in research actively and produced well-founded proposals.

3.2 Relationship with party leaders

However, this working group did not necessarily communicate well with the party group and executive. The annual report 1971/72²² laments that the division generally could get no information on what working groups had done, and, as one of exceptions, lists the first half of the year of the working group Urban Planning. In other words,



Figure 2: Main bicycle routes

party leaders could not keep up with this group in the last half of the year. This situation continued the next year. There were some working groups which regularly submitted reports, according to the annual report 1972/73, while there were some, including the working group Urban Planning, which did not give even data of their meetings for the Binding nor bring any report to the executive and party group. The above short quotation from the annual report 1974/75 was all which was written about the working group Urban Planning. Judging from the fact that there were some working groups, such as the working group Welfare, whose activities were more precisely reported, this group seems to have sent few reports for this year, either.

On the other hand, it was one of the functions of working groups to respond to the requests for advice from the party group. However, as far as the working group Urban Planning is concerned, the party group had never asked for advice. That is, this group chose its themes based on its own judgements, pursued its research independently and submitted reports or written opinions sporadically to party leaders.

3.3 VCP

As expected from the above, the working group Urban Planning was not integrated

systematically into the planning process of the VCP. Concerning the relationship of the working group with the VCP, the group itself explains in the description letter of June 1975 as follows:

Self-evidently the working group Urban Planning follows closely the development (of the VCP, by the author). The subgroup Bicycle tries to evaluate the proposed measures and routes for bicycle traffic, among others with the help of comments from district teams, and, if necessary, propose changes. Concerning public transport, the working group already agreed on what should be changed in the VCP.

The working group indeed examined the VCP in terms of public transport and bicycles, and submitted opinions, particularly based on the Bicycle Plan for the latter. However, it was not officially consulted by party leaders about the VCP itself. In comparison with the Bicycle Plan, the VCP, which was revealed in July, did propose the abolition of the one-way traffic restrictions for bicycles in principle:

The cyclist, like the pedestrian, can be in principle in every road, in every street, in which only in exceptional cases one way traffic may be introduced.

On the other hand, the VCP did not mention the adjustment of the phasing of traffic lights to cyclists, and the proposed "bicycle routes" did not include the circular route around the city which was characteristic of the Bicycle Plan.

4. General member meeting

4.1 Political discussion

The new left of Groningen naturally tried to "democratise" also the highest party organ, the general member meeting (GMM). Until the middle of the 1960s, the GMM of the federation was held only "once a year"²³ and 50 to 60 members attended. Political matters were hardly discussed, and it had almost become a ceremonial gathering. The goal of the new left was to change the GMM into a place where many more party members attended and substantially discussed politics. For this, as a part of the new approach, the executive let party members know the schedule of the GMM earlier, tried to devote as much time as possible to political discussion at the GMM, keeping organisational matters to a minimum, and so on.

Concerning the frequency of the GMM, the first year of the new division, in 1971, the GMM was still held only five times, and the executive was criticised for holding "too few GMMs". However, since the next year, the GMM had been consistently held about ten times a year, at least for the 1970s. Table 2 is the date and summarised agenda for the GMMs in 1974/75.

<p>October 30th, 1974</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- spreading of national departments- regional problems, particularly D.S.M.-factory <p>November 28th, 1974</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Policy Plan- general political situation <p>December 19th, 1974</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- financial report of the division- election of the congress representatives- discussion on 'Peace and Security' <p>January 29th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fares of public transport <p>March 12th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Principle Programme- Lauwersmeergebied as military training ground <p>April 24th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- congress- natural gas prices <p>June 4th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 'Possibilities and impossibilities for a socialistic development policy', guest: Jan Pronk <p>August 26th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Thai Binh- Kalkar- traffic circulation plan <p>September 22nd, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- annual report from the party group <p>October 29th, 1975</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- election of candidates for the regional executive
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Table 2: General member meeting in 1974-75

On the other hand, the attendance at the GMM did not increase so much as party leaders expected. After a year of the new approach, the annual report 1968/69 concedes that "the interest of the members has hardly increased", and concludes that "only the change in meeting techniques is no guarantee for the so desired participation of members". Concerning each division, even the division IV, which was chaired by Van den Berg and led the new approach, frankly reports as follows:

The only difficult point is that, despite an earlier announced meeting schedule, people cannot visit the meeting regularly. As a result, the number of participants was considerably smaller than would have been possible if there had been somewhat greater "faithfulness". We think ourselves that our programme must be worth it.²⁴

After the unification of divisions, the attendance did not increase steadily, either. The annual report 1972/73 states that the average number of participants was 50 to 70, which was 20 to 30 less than the previous year. The report year 1974/75 saw on average about 150 participants, but the next year again experienced a decrease. In the beginning of the year, there were about 110, it is reported, but at the end, the number had fallen to about 70. It was particularly frustrating for party leaders that district team members, who were supposedly engaged in party activities continuously and accumulating experience and knowledge, did not attend the GMM. Even in 1975, when the whole attendance increased, the description letter of April points out that "very few district team members visit" the GMM.

In addition, as can be seen in Table 2, political matters, including those at the municipal level, had been indeed raised on the agenda since the end of the 1960s. However, the GMM had not still gone so far as to become a forum where rank-and-file party members discussed politics substantially and created party policy. For the first year after the unification of the divisions, the GMM "often later discusses implemented policy ". The annual report 1972/73 again states that the intention of the executive "to engage the general member meeting more intensively in discussion on important political problems" was "practically not realised at all".

Bert Middel, division chairman from 1973 to 1975, mentions the GMM in those days in his controversial report, *The New Elite of the PvdA*²⁵, which was written based on his dissertation and published in 1976. He compares the intra-party operation from 1970 to 1974 with that before 1966, when the new left emerged, and examines if the intra-party "democratisation" was actually realised as the new left intended.

Concerning the GMM, he reports, for example, all proposals were made by the executive at those five GMMs which dealt with "the most important political subjects" since 1971. The annual reports by the executive had never been rejected. Those who stood and spoke out at the GMM, except for the "top framework"²⁶, consisted of 8 percent of all the attendants on average. And so on.

Apart from whether these are proofs that the party was operated undemocratically even

in the 1970s as he concluded, it seems that the GMM did not work in fact as party leaders intended, at least until the middle of the 1970s. According to the annual report 1976/77²⁷, the division evaluated its GMM based not only on the number of participants but also on the "substantial discussion and quality of decision", and the division had to concede that "the evaluation on each of these criteria turns out again to be of course not positive."

The following will examine how the VCP was dealt with at the GMM.

4.2 VCP

The VCP was on the agenda of the GMM on August 26th, 1975. As can be seen in Table 2, this GMM was not exclusively reserved for the VCP.

In advance of this GMM, the Binding of August included the explanation of the VCP, covering six pages, with signatures of executive secretary Lauris Beets and councillor Henk de Hamer. They at first admit the lack of public participation, saying, "We regret that it was not possible to undertake participation for this plan." After citing the objectives of the VCP, they turn to the explanation of the plan's content. As can be seen below, it drops a hint of the modified plan, "sector-plan", but it is impossible to understand the content of the plan in detail from this description, particularly as no map of the plan was included.

connecting the Diepenring as distribution ring with a loop system for the accessibility of the centre by car (...) Those who still want to come to the inner city by car will have to get accustomed to parking their cars at the designated parking places (garages). Those who must be somewhere in the inner city can always come to the area – this will, however, be accompanied by a detour. (...) Through keeping the through car traffic out of the inner city as much as possible, it gets quieter and more pleasant. The pedestrian area is expanded: Grote Markt south side and Martinikerkhof.

However, in the conclusion "The plan and the party", they proclaim clearly, without waiting for the discussion at the GMM, that they support the VCP, saying, "The undersigned are now already willing to say that they experience this traffic circulation plan as positive." or "We want to say out loud that we can clearly recognise the party standpoints in this plan." They add that they would submit "some suggestions" at the coming GMM. Finally, concerning growing opposition among business and commercial organisations, which party members of course witness every day, they find it "extremely remarkable". The following is their reason:

The objectives of our party and of this *college* have been known for a long time. For us, the livability of the city is the most important. With these objectives, we have won the election!

"Therefore", they ask the party members, "let's have this important discussion in a businesslike way".

At the GMM on 26th, the executive submitted a "concept-motion" for the VCP. According to this motion, the GMM supports the VCP, although it wants to put some

"remarks":

In the opinion of the general member meeting, the starting points of the traffic policy and public transport policy, such as formulated in the municipal programme of the Groningen division of the PvdA, are clearly recognisable in the traffic circulation plan as well as in the standpoint of the *college van B en W*. (...) The general member meeting wants to, however, put remarks on some points, which will, in its opinion, have to be taken into account in the policy document ultimately approved by the municipal council. (...)

- Also in the surrounding areas, the one-way traffic restrictions for bicycles will have to be abolished where possible.

(...)

- The starting point remains that the residents of the inner city will have to be able also to park their cars in the inner city. (...)

(...)

However, the B&W decided the sector-plan on 22nd, and the local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* publicised it, with a plan map, on 25th, that is a day before the GMM. As a matter of course, the executive and party group were criticised by attendant party members for "having paid too little attention to good information". At the DTC meeting on September 9th, many district team representatives pointed out that "the discussion such as held at the general member meeting had little meaning, because various speakers were obviously poorly informed."²⁸

After all, the GMM approved this motion, it supported the VCP, and it also decided, as earlier mentioned, that party members should take action for the VCP. The "remarks" indeed reflected the opinions of the district teams and working groups. However, they are, after all, just "remarks". The GMM did not, or could not, discuss the VCP itself, and, as a result, did not ask for any modification of it.

5. Framework for party policy making

The three organs, that is district teams, working groups and general member meetings, all of which were intended to facilitate the intra-party democracy, did not function as media in which rank-and-file members participated directly in party-policy making. As a result, the party members could not participate directly in the planning of the VCP at all.

Bert Middel, pointing out the facts that a small number of party members, which he calls an "elite", has a larger influence on decision making than others, and that they are not representative of party members in terms of age and education, concludes that the emergence of the new left within the Groningen PvdA was mere "change of elites", and that the PvdA in the 1970s could not escape the "iron law of oligarchy" by Robert Michels.

However, it is rather essential for political parties, or every organisation, to have a small number of leaders, if they continue to work at all. It is impossible for all the members to have the same influence on each decision-making. The fact that leaders are not representative of members demographically or in terms of education is inevitable. If those leaders ignore the desires of members, or if members cannot let leaders take responsibility for what they did, then the organisation might be called an "oligarchy". In this regard, new left party leaders acted within frameworks which party members had created, and rules were introduced for leaders to take responsibility in terms of these frameworks. In addition, there was room for the public as a whole to influence the party policy through these frameworks. Therefore, the opinions of the public as well as party members were reflected indirectly in the VCP.

5.1 Election programme

Until the 1970s, the Groningen federation of the PvdA, like other federations and parties, did not make its own local election programmes. There were only nationwide party programmes. It was accepted or natural for the party to make municipal, not party, policies after the election, joining in the so-called "*afspiegelingscollege*" in which parties from left to right had seats, and compromising with each other. Or, policy making was rather the privilege of bureaucrats.

The new left tried to break through this "much of a muchness" situation by emphasising the difference from other parties, under the slogan, "polarisation". As the foundation for this strategy, they introduced the election programme peculiar to the city. The GMM of the federation in January 1968, in preparation for the 1970 election, declared the necessity for "a well-founded party programme oriented towards its own city, as a clear guiding principle for the new party group". For this, the federation established a working group, which consisted of three new left and two from "Troika"²⁹. This group submitted as the "basis" for the election programme the Concept

for a Socialistic Municipal Programme. This Concept consisted of eleven chapters, like "participation", "finance", "education", "urban planning", and, in the chapter "traffic", did not choose clearly between traffic modes, nor mention bicycles:

The threatened stifle of the inner city will require a coordinated approach from the government in the future. (...) The priority of public transport will have to be decisive for the quality and quantity of the implemented facilities. In order to strengthen the inner city in its character of an encounter centre, it must be accessible for all traffic. Parking facilities must come as close to the centre as possible. The core area will have to become the domain of pedestrians. (...) The "short-time parking opportunities" must be also expanded. As soon as the legal possibility allows, this parking time can be extended.

The federation accepted this Concept, made the first election programme for the city based on this, and carried on an election campaign in 1970. The result was disappointing, with losing one seat from the 14 incumbent seats, which were already the smallest in the party's history.

For the next election in 1974, the executive commissioned the working group Concept Socialist Municipal Programme to draft the election programme. The district teams were asked for opinions, examined the draft and submitted opinions. For example, the district team Helpman-Oost, Coendersborg reports its meetings on November 8th and 9th, 1973, as follows:

The district team has discussed thoroughly the discussion paper Municipal Programme '74-'78, and sent comments about it to the preparation committee for the Concept Municipal Programme.

The election programme was decided at the GMM on January 15th, 1974. This Municipal Programme 74-78 included twelve chapters, like "urban planning and housing", "regional cooperation", "economic development", and was sold at 1 guilder. The two sections "traffic" and "public transport" within the chapter "urban planning and housing" explain the party traffic policy. As can be seen in the below quotation from the section "traffic", the party chooses clearly particular traffic modes this time:

It must be continued to keep out through traffic in the inner city and residential areas. Public transport and bicycles will acquire a clearly privileged position. (...) Facilities for the car will be limited to those of the highest necessity. Existing short cuts will be closed. Concerning those plans that are not yet implemented, it will have to be examined whether the above principles were well considered.

As a result of campaigning with this election programme, the division won the historical victory, increasing its seats to 18 from the lowest 13.

After the election, the new B&W, which consisted of only left wing parties, set out to draft the first comprehensive municipal plan, the Integrated Policy Plan 1975-1979. As can be seen in Table 1, each district team examined the draft of this plan and submitted opinions. The final draft, which took into account these opinions, was approved at the GMM on November 28th, 1974, with about 200 participants, and the municipal council decided this in December. The following is the quotation from "3.7.4. Traffic".

In the Integrated Plan, it was intended to examine also the financial feasibility, so that the plan's content was rather concrete.

The continuously increasing mobility requires intervening in traffic choice through facilitating the use of bicycles and mopeds and of public transport. The relationship between environment and traffic encourages the exclusion of through traffic out of the inner city and the creation of traffic calming areas in residential neighbourhoods. (...) The facilities for the car have to be restricted to those of the highest necessity. (...) The facilities for bicycles, pedestrians and public transport (...) have priority. (...) Far-reaching traffic measures can only be taken based on a substantial traffic circulation plan. (...) The Vismarkt becomes a pedestrian area. (...) We give high priority to realising our policy plan to make the Grote Markt car free. For this, the participation by business circles is taken so carefully. (...) Our parking policy continues to be oriented towards keeping long-time parking out of the inner city. For residents of the inner city, spaces are reserved in parking garages, in connection with the parking pass regulation. The number of pay parking spaces for short-time parking is kept to 1700.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, programmes or plans have been introduced, which worked as frameworks within which party leaders made each policy, and opinions of party members were reflected in those frameworks. The public as a whole were not involved in making election programmes, but, of course, the opportunities were guaranteed to express their approval or disapproval for them at the elections. The election programme Municipal Programme 74-78 obviously chose public transport, bicycles and pedestrians, and obviously rejected the increase of car use. It seems to be well-founded to say that 40%, or more than 50% if votes for other left parties included, of voters supported this policy.

5.2 Informal framework

Only election programmes or integrated plans might be not enough to direct what party leaders do. The election programmes were after all brochures with at most 20 to 30 pages in total. On the other hand, the Integrated Policy Plan 1975-1979 was almost a book with more than 200 pages, but nevertheless description for each policy was rather fragmentary.

As frameworks for party leaders, an "informal framework", which was created through daily dedicated activities by party members, must have been not less substantial than the officially published documents³⁰. As Table 1 shows, district teams were engaged in neighbourhood problems in their own districts, and sent to party leaders various demands. Among those demands, there were many which were impractical or not well considered, like placing speed bumps on the trunk road. On the other hand, we can recognise radical proposals in the Bicycle Plan by the working group Urban Planning, such as adjusting the phasing of traffic signals to bicycles. Indeed, it was impossible to integrate these demands or proposals as they were into the party policy. However, these voices of party members could accumulatively contribute to creating a framework for party leaders, for example as a message that party members accept or even want drastic measures to restrain car use.

In addition, these voices did not reflect necessarily only the opinions of the PvdA members. Many district teams cooperated with other neighbourhood groups, and there were even some district team members who were more active in these neighbourhood groups. The district teams functioned as an "important link between the electorate and the elected"³¹, and, as a result, the opinions of the public as a whole influenced, at least to a certain extent, an informal framework .

The communication between district teams and working groups on the one hand and party leaders on the other was not ideal. However, we can see in Table 1 some leaders who visited district teams seriously. The inquiry into district teams, whose result was reported in the description letter of February 1976, revealed the fact that "councillors and executive members have visited the meetings of district teams very faithfully. No district team has complaints in this regard.", although it pointed out the lack of active participants. As an institution for communication, there was the DTC. Councillors and executive members, at least a few of them, always attended the DTC meetings, and members of the working group Urban Planning themselves attended this and explained its Bicycle Plan.

The opportunities were indeed limited to the party members to participate directly in party policy making. However, they participated or took the initiative in creating both formal and informal frameworks, and could take into account the public opinions in this process.

5.3 Party discipline

In addition, procedures or rules had been introduced in the 1970s to make sure that party leaders respected these frameworks. All the official standpoints of the division had to be decided by the GMM. The executive and party group were obliged to submit annual reports to the GMM. Furthermore, party members got the chance to recall executive members and councillors. As pointed out, the GMM had not become a place for substantial discussion. However, judging from the fact that, at the GMMs which dealt with important matters, like annual reports, 100 or sometimes more than 200 party members attended, the GMM must have played an important role in forcing party leaders to respect frameworks created by party members.

Moreover, at the election in 1974, it was made a prerequisite to defend frameworks as a united party group if he or she wanted to be placed in the candidate list. The following is the "qualitative advice" for the candidates, which was approved by the GMM on October 19th, 1973:

2. The (candidate) members of the party group defend the election programme which was approved by the division general member meeting of the PvdA, and are willing to test their policy continuously against it and against the decisions of the general member meeting.
3. The members of the party group take it upon themselves to make contact frequently and exchange information actively with members and parts of the organisation of the party, such as district teams, working groups, district team council and general member meeting.

(...)

5. The members of the party group must be willing to:

(...)

- dedicate themselves in a good team spirit for full four years. If this is no longer possible, this must be discussed in the party group, in which the continuation of the councillorship must be tested against the opinion of the party group.

Based on this advice, the executive proposed to place two incumbent councillors, W. Hendriks and G. Minholts, outside the candidate list. They were the last remnant of the conservatives among the party leaders, and took repeatedly the minority opinion within the past party group. The GMM on March 8th, 1974, where more than 350 members attended, approved the candidate list that excluded these two politicians.

Newspapers or other political parties criticised these intra-party operations as "corpse discipline" (*kadaverdiscipline*) or "dictatorship". However, it is fundamental for political parties to keep to promises at the elections, if representative democracy is not a sham. It is also very natural to force political party members to act as a united party group, if the political party can be responsible for the electorate. This is not a radical idea at all, but rather a very classical idea of democratic party politics. B. Tent, one of the Troika, took the same standpoint as the new left in this regard, when he reproved the new left for behaving like "a party within the party" late in the 1960s:

In all their organs, the party will have to learn to walk the way to discuss all the matters openly and fundamentally. These discussions within the party will finally have to result in statements, more strongly expressed in VERY CLEAR STATEMENTS. That alone can give the party a face towards the outside (...) if decisions are made, then the party goes outside as one man. Those who cannot accept this at a certain moment (...) must then take responsibility for this.³²

Thanks to these procedures or rules, frameworks were not nominal, but functioned substantially. In addition, the new left got back the policy making from the bureaucrats, appealing for "politicisation", and were themselves engaged in policy making energetically. Middel shows concretely how often top framework met together in those days³³. Even after the 1974 victory, the PvdA could not dominate alone the majority of the council. However, since 1972, they had chosen not the "*afspiegelingscollege*" but "*programcollege*" consisting of only left wing parties, and tried to realise their own policy, avoiding compromise as much as possible. For the *wethouders*, who were sent in the B&W by the party group, their responsibility to the party group was clearly stipulated in the decision by the GMM on September 14th, 1972 as follows:

The *wethouders* of the PvdA are obliged to refer to these statements of the party group in their political attitudes, and make an effort to realise these in the *college van B&W* and in the council. They are responsible to the party group for this. If a *wethouder* deviates from the views of the party group in matters that are essential for the party group, then he finds himself in conflict with the party group, and the party group can call him to account for this.

6. Conclusion

Those measures that the new left of Groningen introduced for the intra-party democracy did not work as intended. However, the intra-party operation fell by no means into "oligarchy". Party members were engaged in making not each policy but frameworks, and party leaders pursued each policy within these frameworks. In addition, these frameworks reflected public opinion.

Neither the public nor party members had any opportunities to participate directly in planning the VCP. However, again, this VCP was formulated within the formal and informal frameworks created by party members together with the public, and therefore reflected the opinions of the public as well as party members indirectly.

At the election in 1978, the Groningen division of the PvdA lost two seats. But the PvdA lost seats nationwide at this election. If harsh criticism of the VCP by business and commercial circles had been shared by the public, the result might have been much more devastating. Within the division, Van den Berg went to national politics, and the other three PvdA *wethouders*, that is Wallage, B. Barmentloo and L. Westerhof, were placed in the highest three positions of the candidate list. It can be said that party members evaluated positively the last four years' performance of their party leaders, including the VCP.

Notes

- 1 as of January 2005
- 2 In August, this plan was published and sold at 15 guilders.
- 3 It took two years to actually introduce this plan, because it took time to secure national subsidies.
- 4 TSUBOHARA, S. (2003), *Politicisation, Polarisation and Public Participation –Planning History of Groningen, the Netherlands, in 1970s (1)*, URSI-rapport 302, Urban and Regional Studies Institute, University of Groningen
- 5 The Groningen federation (*federatie*) consisted of four divisions (*afdelingen*) until 1970.
- 6 Onze Binding, October 1968
- 7 In addition, the author interviewed some party members who were deeply involved in working groups or district teams in those days. However, the number of interviews still being limited, this paper hardly uses the information from interviews.
- 8 Except for two *wethouders*, Max van den Berg and Wim Hendriks
- 9 Onze Binding, February 1972
- 10 Noorddijk
- 11 from October 1974 to October 1975
- 12 district team Korreweg/ de Hoogte
- 13 from October 1972 to September 1973
- 14 This is the characteristic Dutch municipal organisation. Roughly speaking, it is the cabinet at the municipal level. See 4(TSUBOHARA), 2.
- 15 description letter for the DTC meeting on October 23rd, 1974
- 16 Onze Binding, December 1971
- 17 from November 1975 to November 1976
- 18 letter from J. Wallage to (district) councillors, (district) executive members and district team members in February 1972
- 19 from October 1968 to October 1969
- 20 from December 1970 to December 1971
- 21 report of the meeting of the working group Urban Planning on December 13th, 1972
- 22 from December 1971 to October 1972
- 23 according to party members whom the author interviewed
- 24 Onze Binding, January 1969
- 25 MIDDEL, B. (1976), *De Nieuwe Elite van de PvdA*, XENO
- 26 *topkader*, mainly councillors and executive members
- 27 from November 1976 to September 1977
- 28 description letter for the DTC meeting on October 8th, 1975
- 29 W. Hendriks, B. Tent and M. Kastermans, who had dominated decision making in the Groningen federation until the middle of the 1960s
- 30 Middel (1976) calculated that there were 250 party members "who regularly develop activities politically and organisationally for the division".
- 31 annual report 1974/75
- 32 Onze Binding, October 1968
- 33 Middel (1976), 50

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