

A social movement of clerks Governance innovation in the Netherlands

S.H. van der Arend - Delft University of Technology (s.h.vanderarend@tudelft.nl)

Proposal for a paper presentation at:
First Berlin Forum on Innovation in Governance

Abstract

The emergence of so called new modes of governance, such as network governance, participatory planning, and interactive policy, is mostly explained as a rational response to autonomous, structural changes. Recurring examples of such changes are globalization, the withering away of the nation-state, the growing complexity of society, the emancipation of citizens, and increasing inter-organizational dependencies in the public sphere. However, the rise of any particular mode of governance in a specific context can only occur with the active support and strategic actions of sufficient loyal advocates.

The paper at hand reports on an extensive study into the rise and development of the discourse of interactive planning in the Netherlands. Indeed, this discourse enjoyed the backing of several active advocates, at least for a certain time. During this period, the advocates (and critics) of interactive planning innovated its language and meanings into a more or less coherent frame of reference, while simultaneously organizing themselves into a network. Some of the advocates made an effort to upgrade this network into a 'social movement for democratic renewal'.

Therefore, the theoretical inspiration for this chapter is sought in the tradition of social movement research, in which subsequent theoretical strands have pointed out several features of social movements. Early social movement researchers focused on the individual grievances fuelling what they saw as irrational outbursts of collective action. As a critique, 'resource mobilization' theories pictured social movements as a normal, rational form of interest politics. These theories call attention to the conditions advancing the establishment and prosperity of social movements. The 'cultural turn' in social sciences propelled a relatively new school of researchers. They highlight the role of relations, identities and meanings in social movements. In this paper, all three approaches are employed to describe and explain the rise, demise, and results of the alleged social movement for interactive planning.

The formation of the early advocacy network started when scholars had crafted a variety of ideas – about organizing decision making processes, effective network governance, and enhancing democracy –, into one novel concept: interactive planning. Besides policy researchers and administration scientists, this concept particularly charmed consultants, governors and midlevel bureaucrats. It made them believe they could make better, more effective policies in a more democratic way, thus effectively contributing to a democratization of the relation between government and society. As time went by, however, this 'discursive link' between democracy and efficiency proved hard to maintain. The advocates themselves were the first to rebuff interactive planning. They proclaimed that its 'instrumental meaning' had come to overshadow its idealistic, democratic side, rendering it into a 'public support machine'. The network of advocates fell apart into smaller coalitions promoting various other concepts for effective planning and citizen participation. Interestingly, while the social movement for interactive planning broke down in disappointment, the concept itself was still thriving in the public domain.

Social movement theory, combined with a practice-oriented research approach, gives a critical outlook on governance innovation, highlighting the political, cultural and contextual aspects of changing modes of governing.