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Visioning with the Public: Incorporating Public Values in Landscape Planning

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Abstract *This article focuses on the incorporation of values in visioning, an early stage of landscape planning from a social learning perspective. After an introduction of social learning in planning and visioning directed at expert knowledge and public values, two visioning cases are evaluated. The authors assess methods of making public values manifest and ways to include them in the visioning process. The cases show that surveys, semi-structured interviews and the emphasis on values during the visioning exercise itself were suitable methods to acquaint civilians with both their own values and those of others. The explicit values made communication more effective and enhanced social learning. In both cases, the civilians proved to be capable of expressing their values and visioning in conjunction with experts. The article concludes with the impact of integrating values in landscape planning, the learning process that emerged between the stakeholders and the implication of the findings for visioning practices elsewhere.*

1. Introduction

More and more, civilians find that it is their "right" to be involved in planning processes. Society's expectations about what public participation should accomplish have changed (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). This societal pressure has been felt increasingly by policy-makers and government administrators and expressed in numerous experiences with public participation. Beierle and Cayford (2002) define public participation as any of several "mechanisms" intentionally instituted to involve the lay public or their representatives in administrative decision-making. As a participatory method in which delegated power to civilians is a point of departure, visioning is widely practiced (Shipley, 2000).

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As a result, many processes have moved beyond public consultation rounds into participatory planning. Experiences with participatory planning resulted in new challenges, including soliciting the voices of multiple publics (Umemoto, 2001). Umemoto and Igarashi (2009) note that incorporating a diverse array of voices into planning processes and finding "just solutions" and "common grounds" are longstanding concerns in the planning literature (Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2003). For instance, Beierle (1999) offers a framework that evaluates the outcomes of participatory processes using a set of "social" goals including incorporating public values, assumptions and preferences into decision-making. Selman (2004) explores ways in which governments, interest groups and the wider public can collaborate in planning and managing cultural landscapes, and Vermeulen (2004) develops a framework for incorporating local biodiversity values in planning.

The focus of this article is on integrating public values in planning, as perceived from a social learning perspective. In the literature, social learning is presented as a potential paradigm for engaging the integration of various values in planning (see e.g. Pahl-Wostl & Hare, 2004; Berkes, 2009). In this way social learning is linked to concepts, such as collaborative governance, co-management of natural resources and common-pool management (Webler *et al*., 1995; Pahl-Wostl, 2002). Healey (2009) recognizes the importance of practical wisdom and practical judgement in emphasizing the dimensions of planning as a practically situated, social learning activity. In this article, public values are central, including civilians' values of the area, their ethics with respect to the human/nature relationship and the way civilians value different landscape elements, which influence their opinion on future developments. Although these values are more deeply hidden than factual knowledge and thus, more difficult to elicit, emphasis on values prior to or during the visioning process is important, since it improves communication among stakeholders (Aarts, 1998). This increases efficiency of the debate (Jacobs *et al*., 2002) and contributes to mutual understanding, or even consensus, on an abstract level (Keulartz *et al*., 2000).

In this article, we address the question: Is the elicitation of public values in planning a fruitful basis for social learning? In order to answer this main question, we formulate two sub questions: (1) What are the environmental values of both experts and civilians in landscape visioning? and (2) Can value elicitation contribute to social learning in a visioning setting? To answer these questions, we first briefly review literature on social learning and environmental values. In this we pay attention to visioning and expert knowledge. In the next section, two cases in the context of landscape planning provide an illustration of the way in which public values can be incorporated in the planning process through visioning and how public values can be elicited. This study is empirically driven in the sense that the case studies are taken as point of departure to discover the problems and challenges involved in a visioning process that includes both experts and civilians.

2. Social Learning

One of the fundamental questions in relation to social learning is whether participatory processes lead to a shared understanding of circumstances on which agreement and action can be based, which process features and context factors foster or inhibit this change and how they contribute to process outcomes (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008). First, we define the concept of social learning and then identify conditions which may facilitate

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social learning. Woodhill (2003 cited in Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004, p. 143) defines social learning as the process by which communities, stakeholder groups or societies learn how to innovate and adapt in response to changing social and environmental conditions. Social learning actively engages different groups in society in a communicative process of understanding problems, conflicts and social dilemmas and creating strategies for improvement. Thus, social learning is more than just "community participation" or learning in a group setting. It involves understanding the limitations of existing institutions and mechanisms of governance and experimenting with multi layered, learning oriented and participatory forms of governance. Facilitating social learning is the capacity to design a process in which different stakeholder groups engage diverse forums and activities so that knowledge is generated, ideas, values and perspectives are shared and can be contested. Bouwen and Taillieu (2004) emphasize the social dynamics which take place in social learning processes. When different stakeholder groups participate, it leads to sharing responsibility, such as information exchange, shared construction of reality, empowerment and internalization. Information exchange provides the cognitive basis for enhancing the interchange between expert knowledge and local knowledge. A social construction of reality emerges from shared experiences and enacts formal, as well as informal coordinating patterns of behaviour. Empowerment provides the opportunity for organizational members to use valued skills and abilities towards important goals, to gain self-confidence and to engage in co-ownership of projects.

A question that arises is in what settings social learning may occur. Characterizing situations for social learning are interdependency, complexity, uncertainty and controversy (Collins & Ison, 2006). Interdependency is at stake when it is difficult to draw a boundary around an issue for the purpose of naming it and thus, enable more focused enquiry into its nature and how to deal with it. In natural resources management, for example, one type of human activity affects ecological processes in ways that interact with other people's uses of the water, both across geographic and ecosystem boundaries and time scales. Complexity takes place, to a large extent, as a result of interdependencies. Complex issues are often prevailing in natural resources management where many stakeholders are involved, various interests play a role and entangled problems are envisaged. Complexity leads to substantial uncertainty among many of the actors involved in the situation on what the nature of the issue is and how it might be progressed. Uncertainty may arise from a lack of knowledge about technical and ecological processes; social values and wants, and public and policy-making imperatives. The combination of interdependencies, complexity and uncertainty often results in controversy because of multiple perceptions about the nature of the issue, the underlying causes of the issue and how to deal with these.

Following Mostert *et al*. (2007), social learning is based on three key ideas. First, all stakeholders should be involved as no single stakeholder has all the necessary information; therefore, the stakeholders need to collaborate. Second, to facilitate collaboration, this requires a form of organization in order to coordinate stakeholders' actions in a sustained way. This means that the stakeholders need to enter into a long-term working relationship, for example, through participation in users' organizations, multi stakeholder platforms or informal policy networks. Third, the domain of planning is a learning process which requires the development of new knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours to deal with differences constructively, adapt to change and cope with uncertainty.

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2.1 *Visioning*

In this study, social learning takes place within an early stage of landscape planning, visioning. Visioning is a process in which participants build consensus on a description of the group's desired future and is based on actions to help making that future a reality (Moore *et al*., 1999). An important aspect of visioning is the way a vision has been established. If a vision is shared, many people will be committed to it (Senge, 1994).

Visioning is supposed to be inclusive, collaborative and consensus-based (McCann, 2001). As such, it makes use of the "co-think capacity" of stakeholders. Visioning can also offer the opportunity to "imagineer" futures for places in ways that facilitate innovative, creative and comprehensive perspectives beyond those of traditional land-use and market-led planning (Gaffikin & Sterrett, 2006). Visioning used as a public participation tool provides an effective pathway that can be followed towards a shared plan (Senge, 1994; Morrison, 2003). Although common practice in urban planning in The Netherlands, visioning has been rarely used in the Dutch water sector, but projects like Hamlet IJsselzone Zwolle[1] and Stadsblokken Meinerswijk[2] in Arnhem provided for an increased acceptance of this planning method.

Critics of visioning by stakeholders and involved civilians stress that it entails high costs and that expectations may be created that cannot be fulfilled (Haines, 1998). Others, like Helling (1998), object that a vision does not stand for a plan capable of providing a route to realize the vision including the resources needed. Besides, scholars' critique concerns the factor of power in visioning processes. McCann (2001) and Hurley and Walker (2004) show that planning is an arena for competing visions for the future of the landscape, a struggle between different social groups regarding whose vision should guide planning in the years to come. In spite of the increasing number of visioning projects referred to in literature some difficulties remain. Cole (2001) mentions the gap between a vision and its realization in practice. Wilson (1992) describes pitfalls like executive impatience, lack of flexibility, failure to implement and to build consensus.

3. Environmental Values

Central to social learning is the understanding of problems, conflicts and social dilemmas and creating strategies for improvement. Therefore, in a social learning process, knowledge, ideas, values and perspectives have to be shared. While the interests of the participants are more or less clear, their values are more difficult to grasp. In search for methods to value landscape and nature, support can be found in, for example, psychology (Thompson & Barton, 1994; Schultz, 2001) and (empirical) philosophy (Minteer & Manning, 1999; Van den Born, 2006; De Groot *et al*., 2011). Following Rokeach's (1973, p. 5) definition, we consider values as "enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (p. 5). Especially, the abstract and enduring characteristic of values make it an interesting beacon in visioning processes. A framework commonly used by both philosophers and psychologists is the distinction between anthropocentric and ecocentric values. From an anthropocentric viewpoint, nature has merely instrumental value and can thus be utilized for human needs. Ecocentrists, on the other hand recognize the intrinsic value of nature, meaning that nature also has values regardless of human needs (Zweers, 2000). Another famous distinction is

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into biospheric, altruistic and egoistic values, which Stern *et al*. (1995) derived from the Norm-activation model of Schwartz (1970). In this biospheric is comparable to ecocentrism and egoistic with anthropocentrism. Closely related are studies on visions on the human/nature relationship. Based upon a philosophical classification into Mastery over nature, Stewardship of nature, Partnership with nature and Participation in nature, empirical studies (De Groot & Van den Born, 2003; Van den Born, 2008) showed that the Dutch population fiercely rejects the anthropocentrism of Mastery and instead adheres to a Stewardship relation with nature, or to a lesser extent, to the ecocentric relationship of Participation in nature. Although many studies in this field have a scientific purpose (Burgess & Harrison, 1988; Satterfield, 2001) a growing number of studies are also relevant for policy-making, such as Davenport and Anderson (2005) and Jacobs and Buijs (2011). Bogaert *et al*. (2003) state that their study on environmental values among civilians and leisure seekers provides insight into the potential support for (future) policies, while Davies (2001) aims to give the silent majority a voice. They assume that visions and values of nature are related to preferences for certain landscapes or spatial plans. Only a few scholars have investigated and shown correlations between anthropocentric values and preferences for managed nature, and between ecocentrism and wildlands (Kaltenborn & Bjerke, 2002). From studies among experts and farmers we know that there are considerable differences between the image and values of nature and those of civilians (Bonnes & Bonaiuto, 1995; Harrison & Burgess, 2000; Jacobs & Buijs, 2011).

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3.1 *Expert Knowledge*

Especially in case of experts, the question raises how values relate to knowledge.

Scholars like Woodhouse and Nieusma (2001) and Liberatore and Funtowicz (2003) demonstrate that expertise is imbued with values; it is not and cannot be objective, neutral or disinterested; and uncertainty provides for constraints of expert guidance on complex public issues. Additionally, scholars worry not so much about whether values are present in expert knowledge but about whether some peoples' values are systematically over-represented through access to and representation by expertise, while those of others are systematically under-represented (Woodhouse & Nieusma, 2001). An example is the use of expert knowledge in Dutch planning processes for the problem definition, exploration of options to solve the proposed problem and selecting an alternative that fits most.

Several studies (Fischer, 2000; Nowotny *et al*., 2002; Rinaudo & Garin, 2005) show that it proves to be effective to bring experts and civilians together. An important advantage is that a social learning process will take place which may open the eyes of both experts and civilians to an others' views and values, and clarify their positions. The expert–civilian interaction may turn out positive when some basic rules for interactions are set, e.g. that the setting needs to be a learning environment in which trust may grow and those concerned learn new ways of relating to each other (Healey, 1998). However, neither the studies mentioned in this section nor the handbooks on visioning give concrete directions on how value studies can be used in visioning. In the two cases described in this article we explore several methods to explicate values in visioning and to reach a balanced contribution of experts and civilians.

4. Methods

Two cases in The Netherlands were selected for this study: Beuningen, a village in the East along the river Rhine, and Arnemuiden, a village in the South-West near the shore of Lake Veere. Both areas are on the outskirts of the municipality, with surface water as a leading principle in spatial planning. The cases show many differences as depicted in Table 1.

First, in each case, different methods were used to elicit values. In Beuningen, a questionnaire focusing on nature in the floodplain was distributed among the general population. In Arnemuiden, after a general round of interviews with most stakeholders, a questionnaire concerning landscape elements was circulated among the participants of the first session. Also, the method to elicit public values during the discussions was different. While in Beuningen the focus was on the perception of the landscape as a whole, in Arnemuiden the valuation and ranking of landscape elements was pivotal.

Second, the way the public was involved differed in both cases. In Beuningen considerably fewer civilians were involved than in Arnemuiden and during the sessions, experts were allowed to take part. In Arnemuiden civilians and experts held separate meetings (except for the initial meeting) and experts gave only written feedback and suggestions on civilians' ideas.

Finally, although both cases were designed as experiments, their institutional environment was different. The sessions in Beuningen were organized without any link to decision-making, while those in Arnemuiden were planned to result in advice to the city council and were as such part of the decision-making process. Because of this, local politicians in Arnemuiden were interested in the way it was organized, how it was running and what the possible outcome would be, while the interest of local politicians in Beuningen was much lower. The sessions in Beuningen can be considered as a "closed" process since it had a pre-defined group of participants and information about the sessions was not made public, while the Arnemuiden process was open to all interested parties and information about the sessions was published in the local press. The difference in institutional environment might give some answers on relevant issues in visioning

Table 1. Differences between case Beuningen and case Arnemuiden

	Case Beuningen	Case Arnemuiden
Value elicitation	Survey among general population about values and visions of nature ($N = 423$)	Interviews among civilians, experts, governmental parties and other stakeholders ($N = 60$)
	Group discussions	Survey among participants of first session about values of landscape elements ($N = 45$)
		Group discussions
Public involvement	Joint sessions of six civilians and seven experts	Separate sessions of 45–60 civilians and experts
Institutional environment	Experiment outside political frames	Experiment of which result is part of decision-making process
	Closed process	Open process
	Result: brochure with information of dreaming sessions and map of dream image	Result: planning advice for the city council

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literature, e.g. the expectations of the participants and how to reach consensus. While the experimental status of the visioning process may decrease the participants' expectations, the term visioning could have been a contrary effect as some experts of the Beuningen case stated, since vision in Dutch ("visie") suggests the obligation to consult stakeholders. Two of seven experts considered the term "visioning" inappropriate. Hence, the experiment was called "dreaming sessions". In Arnemuiden the term dreaming sessions was also used, but the municipality even feared the word "dreaming" as it might raise false expectations. Nevertheless this was not a problem to the civilians involved and, therefore, the organizers stuck to the term. Therefore, we will refer to the experiments as "dreaming sessions."

4.1 *Case Beuningen*

The floodplain of Beuningen is a partly natural area of 250 hectare along the river Rhine, in the East of The Netherlands (Figure 1). The floodplain borders three villages of the municipality of Beuningen: Weurt, Beuningen and Ewijk (23,000 inhabitants). The floodplain used to be agricultural grassland, but as a result of nature restoration projects in the 1990s it turned largely into forest. The Beuningen floodplain represents various opportunities, e.g. the redevelopment of an old brick factory, the plan to dig side channels and the development of recreation facilities. The area also has some potential planning bottlenecks, such as polluted soil, a plan for a port for inland vessels and a storage site for industrial tubes.

Researchers from Radboud University Nijmegen organized four dreaming sessions in autumn 2006.[3] Some months before the dreaming sessions took place, 1000 questionnaires were circulated among randomly selected civilians in the three villages of the municipality, of which 423 were returned. This questionnaire measured visions of nature, visions of the human/nature relationship and opinions on four flood protection measures in the floodplain: the plan to dig a side channel, dike reinforcement, dike relocation and the removal of

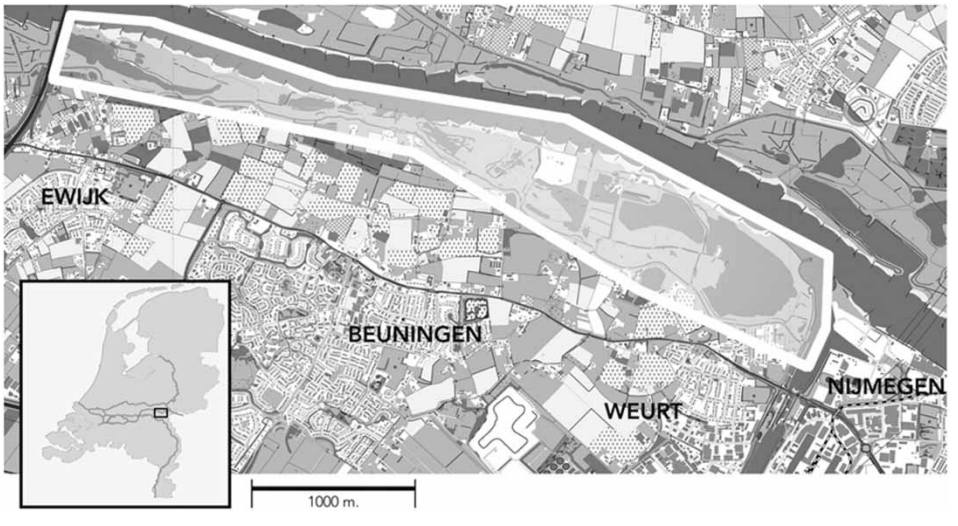

Figure 1. Map of the Beuningen planning area.

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trees (see for more information De Groot & De Groot, 2009). For the dreaming sessions the researchers invited by letter all floodplain landowners, two angling clubs, a farmers' organization and 30 civilians who had specified their willingness to participate in the experiment on the questionnaire. All were invited for an information meeting on the dreaming sessions, resulting in four civilians, an angler and a farmer who were willing to participate. Seven experts were selected based upon their professional involvement in the area.[4]

During the first two sessions mutual learning was the central theme, while the third and last sessions focused on shared visioning. During the first session all participants explained in five minutes their connection to the Beuningen floodplain and what they thought to be important for the others to know about the area. The aim of the second session was to make explicit the visions of nature. After a presentation of the survey results the participants made their personal dream image of the floodplain based upon their selection from 30 photos of floodplains mainly taken in the surrounding areas of Beuningen. Each participant was asked to select four or five photos that showed his or her desired landscape in the future. Each presented and explained his personal dream image to the rest of the group, followed by an explanation why he thought his dream image was more beautiful and more natural or better than the current situation.

A spatial designer supervised the participants during the last two sessions towards a shared dream image presented on a map of the Beuningen floodplain. During the third session the participants were divided into three groups. Each group got a different focus to draw its shared dream: nature, economic developments or recreation. These themes had emerged from the first two sessions. After the three groups presented their dreams to the others at the end of the session, the spatial designer analysed their dreams. It led to the design of the fourth session, wherein the participants were divided into two groups. One group focused on the eastern part, while the other group dreamed about the western part of the floodplain. During this last session a movie on the "Freude am Fluss" project was shot and the evening ended with live music and some drinks together.

After four sessions the civilians regretted that nothing would be done with the results. Hence, one of them took the lead and arranged a meeting including most of the participating civilians and three aldermen of Beuningen. As this initiative did not result in any visible action by the municipality, the participants declined to take further steps. Half-a-year later, the dream was taken into an inter-municipality planning process along the river Waal initiated by the project "Waal Wealth" (WaalWeelde).[5]

4.2 *Case Arnemuiden*

The village of Arnemuiden is situated in the South-West of The Netherlands close to Lake Veere (Figure 2). Apart from recreational activities the land is mainly used for agriculture. After the village became part of the municipality of Middelburg in 1997, some plans for housing development and water-related activities were launched. Since none of these plans were accepted due to strong opposition by civilians of Arnemuiden the municipality decided to adapt the planning process towards a more interactive approach in which the civilians of Arnemuiden would actively be involved.

In 2006, a consortium of partners including Erasmus University Rotterdam[6] designed a dreaming process with separate sessions for civilians and experts. The planning activities in the past had strained the relations in the area to a point where civilians were expected

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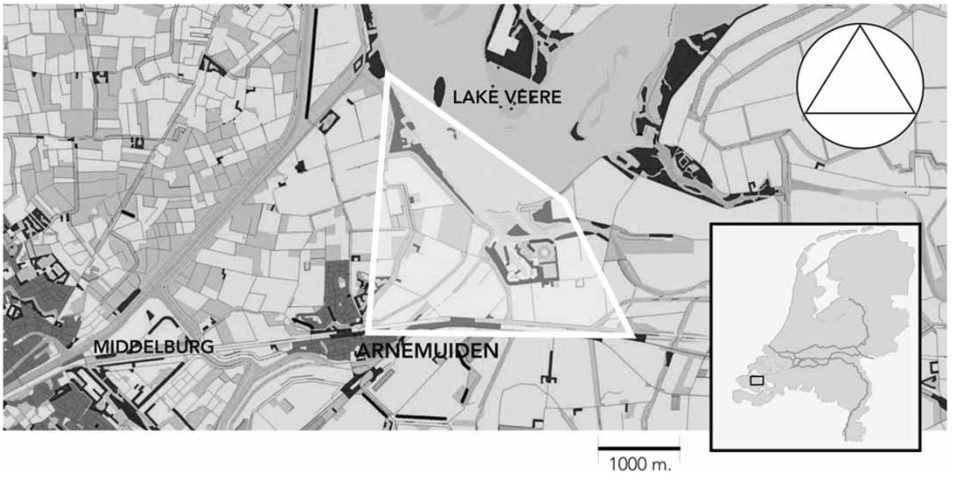

Figure 2. Map of the Arnemuiden planning area.

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not to cooperate in sessions organized with the attendance of experts. In case specialized information was required, the civilians were supported by, among others, a group of experts.

Prior to the start, the organizers held circa 60 interviews among more than 100 civilians, stakeholders, experts and other (governmental) parties. The aim of interviews included identifying the willingness of the interviewees to participate.

Since the sessions in Arnemuiden had many participants, the valuation during the sessions was aimed at the ranking of landscape elements to easily measure and analyse the values. The dreaming sessions started with a kick off meeting, for which all citizens and other stakeholders were invited. The audience filled in a questionnaire and based on the outcome, the organizers identified four themes for dream scenarios, to be developed by the citizens in future sessions. During the first two sessions, about 45 citizens and stakeholders developed these dream scenarios in four groups on the highly valued themes: "water and nature", "water and history", "water and recreation" and "water and housing". At this stage every participant could dream freely and the focus was on the participants' reasons for having a certain dream scenario. The facilitators explicated the dream scenarios in a story line and a map was drawn, which the participants approved.

After the second session the experts discussed the dream scenarios' feasibility and made suggestions, which the citizens considered during the third session when they presented their final dream scenarios. Afterwards, the organizers divided the dream scenarios into elements that all participants "valued". By use of stickers the citizens explicated which elements of the scenarios were most important (two per dream scenario). They also underpinned this with arguments that had been labelled in the first two sessions. After the third session, the organizers formulated two new scenarios out of the "most valued" elements. In sessions four and five, the citizens further developed these scenarios into more realistic variants. In the fifth session, the citizens, feedback of the experts, after which they further specified the dream scenarios. Finally, during the last session all citizens agreed on the co-existence of two final plans, stressing that both should be presented to the municipality.

After the dreaming sessions were finished one of the participating civilians presented the final two scenarios to the mayor of Middelburg. It was now up to politics whether these two scenarios would be incorporated in the design of plans for the area.

5. Results

This section will first focus on the values elicited in both visioning cases, and then on the contribution of value elicitation to social learning.

5.1 *Environmental Values*

In the Beuningen case the valuation of nature was central while in the Arnemuiden case the focal point was on the valuation of landscape elements. This section will put the values of both civilians and experts into perspective by showing the links with visions of nature and preferences for certain spatial planning options.

Prior to the initial meeting in Arnemuiden, 60 semi-structured interviews showed that the existence of surface water was viewed as the most important element in the area, apart from four other characteristics: nature, history, recreation and housing. The stakeholders contributed several values to water in the area; ecological, esthetical, experience, financial–economic, (cultural)historical, recreational and social. The participants identified with several values and also related the valuation of water to nature, recreation, history and housing. The attributed values differed per participant or participating party. The municipality and province mainly attributed ecological, recreational and financial-economic values to the water. Local stakeholders and civilians attributed to all values but focused on esthetical, social and cultural–historical values. Differences occurred between the municipality and local stakeholders on what kind of financial-economic and recreational values were important. For instance, concerning financial-economic values, the municipality focused on the raise of house prices, while local stakeholders stressed the possibility for local facilities and employment.

Further, the elicitation showed that experts' values deviated from those of civilians. Both scenarios designed by the civilians included a new waterway connecting the centre of the village to Lake Veere. Yet, the experts expected this to be very expensive and alternatively proposed the development of an inland lake instead of an open waterway. However, the civilians did not appreciate this because they wanted boats to navigate from the lake to the centre in order to stimulate recreation and to restore the water-related history of the area. From their point of view the inland lake would be no alternative at all.

In Beuningen, the survey showed that the general population fiercely rejected an anthropocentric despotic relationship with nature (mean: -0.81 on a five-point scale between -2 and 2) and instead adheres to more caring relationship in which humans are part of nature and responsible to preserve it, called the Guardian (mean: 1.31). Also more ecocentric values are popular, such as the Participant of nature (mean: 1.0) and Companionship with nature (0.52). The survey also showed that the respondents are most positive about digging a side channel. They perceive this flood protection measure as most natural and most beautiful measure (means 0.37 and 0.40 on a five-point scale between -2 and 2). The removal of trees is perceived as the least natural and beautiful (means: -1.35 and -1.36). Yet, they regarded dike reinforcement as the safest option (mean: 1.0). More than half of the respondents (57%) regarded safety in the floodplain important and 80%

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considered beauty important. The correlation between the values and the opinions on the flood protection measures is weak; only high support for the Guardian predicts lower support for the removal of trees ($p < 0.01$, Beta $= -0.28$).

In addition to the survey, the sessions in the Beuningen case gave some qualitative insights. In the group discussion many differences in visions of nature became apparent, but unlike the Arnemuiden case the division was not between experts and civilians. The river manager's dream for the area was open agricultural grassland without trees because this is the best way to keep the water level of the Waal river low. The farmer had somewhat the same vision, although he also recognized that the land in the floodplain is not very profitable for agriculture anymore. Opposed to these anthropocentric visions is the more ecocentric vision of the nature conservation agencies, which were in favour of wilderness with forest and the creation of side channels to lower the water level. All civilians took a middle position; they accepted the "wilderness" vision of the nature conservation agencies while at the same time valuing the former grassland that used to be managed by local farmers. This clearly shows that the visions of experts were largely influenced by the organization they represent, while civilians made a combination of the experts' visions.

The Beuningen case also demonstrates that not only their profession or hobby but also the participants' gender influenced their vision. Despite many attempts to reach an equal split between men and women, the sessions were still dominated by men. When the only female civilian described her enjoyment of the birds and her daily astonishment at nature's beauty, the contrast with the down-to-earth stories of the male civilians and especially the rational and economical vision of the farmer became very apparent. She openly admitted that she felt insecure expressing this sentimental minority voice, and apologized for not being as clever as the rest. Yet, when she decided to quit for this reason, all participants persuaded her to stay by ensuring that they all greatly appreciated the diversity in visions she contributed to.

These examples show that a diversity in participants results in a broad range of values that are likely to be overlooked in a planning process that only involves experts.

5.2 *The Contribution of Value Elicitation to Social Learning*

The Beuningen and Arnemuiden cases demonstrate that visioning can be organized in various ways. An important aspect is how to deal with differing values. Discussing values puts conflicts and disagreements on the table from the very beginning. During the process the dreams of most participants were influenced to some extent by the perspectives of others, which formed an important step towards the joint vision. For instance, in the Beuningen case the civilians quickly learned and used the experts' knowledge and vocabulary, while the experts increasingly accepted the civilians' preferences and visions. It took the civilians only one or two sessions to familiarize themselves with the concepts and the problems in the area. At the same time, the experts became acquainted with the angler's fishing experiences, the farmer's cynicism caused by yet another obstacle to earning his livelihood, the strong attachment of some civilians to the area and the role the floodplain played in their daily lives. The importance of this learning process became clear during the last session, when an expert joined who did not attend the preceding sessions. He formed a sharp contrast with the other experts when he persistently tried to convince the civilians of his viewpoints. It took more than half an hour before he and the others found a common language and accepted each other's reality so that they

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could start working on a shared dream. Yet, at the end of the meeting he was still not convinced of the civilians' perspective.

It is not only the openness and acceptance of the others' preferences that enables social learning. It is also the insight into the reasons behind their preference, their values. These values might form a basis for common ground or mutual understanding. In the Arnemuiden case some participants valued the preservation of the historical character of the area while others wanted to maintain the peace and quietness of the area. However, through discussing their goals and arguments it turned out that despite their differing values these groups shared the same vision on the area if put in more concrete terms, e.g. the preservation of an open, partly agricultural area with original vegetation and possibilities for nature recreation. Hence, by explicating their values, different perspectives found common ground. The same occurred when discussing housing development in the area. While the civilians favoured new housing in order to enable the young and elderly to stay in the village, the municipality promoted it to finance other developments such as recreational activities.

Common ground for mutual understanding was also found in the Beuningen case when the flood protection measure to cut down trees in the floodplain was at issue. The respondents of the survey were very much opposed to this measurement as were many participating civilians. Nevertheless their preference changed during the dreaming process, influenced by the farmer's and river manager's values. The idea of some patches of grass land in between the forest sounded very appealing for all participating civilians. Their reason for supporting this idea, however, was not because the meadows contribute to agriculture or flood defence. They valued especially the open view over the river from the dike as they could see the river without having to cross the floodplain.

In Beuningen, the experts were very receptive to the civilians' visions of the area, which made discussions efficient and consensus within reach. Two reasons may explain the experts' open attitude. First, the result of the visioning was non-binding so they did not have any responsibility towards their organization to gain advantage. Second, the positive input of the civilians showed the experts that civilians can be reasonable partners instead of the opponents they usually meet in conflict situations. These two reasons do not hold for the Arnemuiden case because the result of the experiment was more binding, as it arose from a conflict between the municipality of Middelburg and the civilians. Since the visioning process provided for support of the main developments in the area, the municipality is expected to recognize the relevance of the final dream scenarios which partly overlapped with the plans previously presented by governmental parties. Due to the visioning experiment the municipality and civilians were able to break out of the deadlock situation in which the civilians preferred the status quo and obstructed all initiatives of the municipality.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

In this conclusion, we will answer the main question of this study; Is the elicitation of public values a fruitful basis for social learning in a visioning context? In order to do so we first answer the two sub questions: (1) What are the environmental values of both experts and civilians in landscape visioning? and (2) How can value elicitation contribute to social learning in a visioning setting? Subsequently, we take into consideration the theoretical background and reflect on the methods used.

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In Beuningen the results of the survey showed that the general population adhered to rather ecocentric relationships with nature, such as Guardianship of nature, Partnership with nature and Participation in nature. These results support previous studies of Van den Born (2006, 2008). While the general population fiercely rejected anthropocentrism, the water manager and the farmer dreamed about a landscape that primarily serves man. De nature conservation agency dreamed the most ecocentric dream, although they were also pragmatic in the sense that they supported the creation of side channels to protect inhabitants from flooding. This made clear that whether ecocentrist or anthropocentrist, all participants attached the highest value to human safety. The participating civilians took a middle position between the nature conservation agency, and the water manager and farmer. This does not support studies of Butler and Accot (2007) and Campagna and Fernández (2007), who show that institutions tend to stress the economic utility of nature, while the public adheres to ecocentrism.

In Arnemuiden the interviews, survey and group discussions both converged into the identification of seven values attributed to water in the area; ecological, esthetical, experience, financial-economic, (cultural)historical, recreational and social. The municipality especially focused on financial-economic, recreational and ecological values. This deductively developed classification is much more tailored to the area than the profound division in ecocentrism and anthropocentrism used in the Beuningen survey. Although the values in Arnemuiden are less profound, they provide more grip for the design of a spatial plan. The Arnemuiden case showed that civilians and experts have differing values, but the Beuningen case demonstrates that this is not always true. The differing values in Arnemuiden are probably a result of the deadlock situation which the municipality and the civilians had run into prior to the experiment. The Beuningen participants did not have a conflict before the experiment, their values were primarily linked to their profession, hobby or gender.

When reflecting on the methods used for the elicitation of values, the Arnemuiden case shows that the use of various methods proved to be worthwhile to make triangulation possible, which strengthened the validation of the results. In-depth interviews with potential participants gave a valuable preview on their values, which is an important basis for the design of the sessions. Yet, semi-structured interviews can only elicit the values of a relatively small group. The alternative is a large scale survey among the general population as carried out in the Beuningen case. In that case it is difficult to bring respondents' values to the discussion during visioning because only a few of them will take part in the sessions. The respondents of the survey, therefore, need "ambassadors" who demand attention to the values of those who are not participating. As experts will be bound to serve the interests of their organization, participating civilians are most likely to take up this role.

Concerning the second question, the contribution of value elicitation to social learning in visioning processes, both cases show that the elicitation of values contributed to consensus building. Despite differing visions and preferences, discussing the reasons behind them may make the participants understand the others' position, resulting in a joint search for a shared vision. In the Arnemuiden case, this led to the design of two scenarios that did not deviate much from the plan the municipality presented earlier. The main difference is however, that civilians were part of the process; they were taken seriously and their values formed the basis of the scenarios. This implies that this type of visioning will not ultimately lead to a totally different plan, because it is limited by the same physical and organizational boundaries. Therefore, the merits of incorporating values in visioning lies in the empowerment of the civilians and co-ownership, which is exactly in line with

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the observations of Bouwen and Taillieu (2004). The ability of participants to reach a mutual goal despite their differences in values, supports the convergence hypothesis of Norton (1991), in which he claims that both ecocentrists and weak anthropocentrists often support similar policies. However, more empirical evidence is needed to support his hypothesis.

The fact that social learning occurred is closely related to the setting in which the visioning took place. Both cases show all four characteristics as described by Collins and Ison (2006); interdependency, complexity, uncertainty and controversy. In both cases, interdependency is at stake because many human activities play a role in the area and to reach a shared dream scenario, all stakeholders have to give in. Both cases are complex as many stakeholders are involved, various interests are at issue and the problems envisaged are entangled which led to much uncertainty among many of the actors. However, in the Arnemuiden case uncertainty was more prominent than in the Beuningen case. The combination of interdependency, complexity and uncertainty resulted in controversy in both cases. While in the Beuningen case the controversy was in a latent stage, in the Arnemuiden case it was made manifest through the resistance against earlier plans. Yet, the cases did not meet the first key idea of social learning according to Mostert *et al.* (2007), because not all stakeholders were involved and because the visioning was only temporary. We would, therefore, claim that social learning can also occur when the majority of the stakeholders is involved and if the working relationships are short-term. Conditional for social learning is, however, that the organization of the participatory process provide sufficient structure and incentives as both cases showed which matches the second key idea of social learning (Mostert *et al.,* 2007). Regarding the organization, the largest challenge in this study was to provide a setting in which both experts and civilians felt comfortable enough to freely exchange ideas. In Arnemuiden experts did not dream together with civilians, which enabled civilians to speak out more freely, not hindered by experts pointing at "realism" and cost limitations. Additionally, it prevented the experts from overruling civilians' ideas based on familiarity with the material, rich vocabulary and presentation skills. Two precautionary measurements were taken to prevent this from happening in the Beuningen case, where civilians and experts shared the same table. First, the organization of an information session for the civilians prior to the dreaming sessions acquainted the civilians with the organizers, the setting, the other participants and the issues at stake. Second, the first couple of sessions the participants received limited speaking time to prevent the experts from dominating the discussion. These measures turned out to be sufficient; although the civilians were still uncertain about their presentation skills during the first three sessions, they took the lead in presenting visions on the area in the fourth session.

Based upon our findings we regard visioning a fruitful planning tool to stimulate social learning between the public and experts. Especially the Arnemuiden case shows that this approach can even successfully generate acceptance for a spatial plan in situations where conflicts and disagreement prevail. We also expect positive results in other cases, including large cities, provided some criteria are met. First, the elicitation of values should be part of the visioning in order to bridge different perspectives on landscape and preferences for spatial plans. Second, both the visioning and the elicitation of values should be tailormade, taking into account the context specific characteristics, such as tensions between the participants, size of the discussion group or public support for proposed or previous plans. Other studies (Fischer, 2000; Nowotny *et al*., 2002; Rinaudo & Garin, 2005) support our

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finding that experts and civilians may reach a very effective social learning process, and by doing so they may even be able to overcome conflict situations that find their origins in differing values. The elicitation of values supports this learning process because it gives insight into what is most important and acceptable to each participant. It also supports the conclusion of Keulartz *et al*. (2000) that reaching this deeper level may be a basis for consensus. In this way, it can be viewed as a deliberative governance practice. Public involvement organized in the form of multi stakeholders' platforms are conditional to reach a shared understanding and a joint vision on the problems at stake. This article, thus, demonstrates that visioning with the public has the potential to lead to an inspiring mutual understanding between civilians and experts, and deserves to be employed more widely as a participatory tool, so that they can truly dream together.

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Notes

1. Available at www.zwolle.nl/cms/cms.nsf/AllByUNID/BE5B65C31DCCD7BDC12572D4003392BC (accessed 19 November 2008).
2. Available at http://www.stadsblokken-meinerswijk.nl/index.php?id=165 (accessed 19 November 2008).
3. The visioning experiment was initiated within the context of the European "Freude am Fluss" project to test the first steps of a guideline for joint planning; mutual learning and shared visioning.
4. Executive Agency for Water Management, municipality of Beuningen, province of Gelderland, two nature conservation agencies, a sand and clay extraction enterprise and an environmental scientist from the Radboud University Nijmegen who designs side channels in the floodplain.
5. Available at www.waalweelde.nl, a Dutch spin-off of the Freude am Fluss project (accessed 13 October 2011).
6. The consortium consisted of the province of Zeeland, the municipality of Middelburg, water board Zeeuwse Eilanden, Executive Agency for Water Management (*Rijkswaterstaat*), Government Service for Land and Water Management (*Dienst Landelijk Gebied*), Knowledge organization Living with water (*kennisimpulsprogramma Leven met Water*), knowledge institute TNO, consulting and engineering company Tauw and Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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