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In-between dynamics

Towards a reconceptualization of soft spaces in regional planning

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Abstract

Collaboration across organizations is generally seen as a prerequisite for dealing with complex regional problems. This has led to a proliferation of new, informal and improvisational collaborative approaches, next to the more classical, formally institutionalized realities. From a geographic perspective the emergence of these different types of approaches has been captured in terms of 'soft spaces' and 'hard spaces' of regional planning. Despite the proliferation, soft space scholars observe a limited impact of these approaches. Drawing on a case study on urban regeneration strategies in the Dutch Randstad conurbation, we suggest that the limitation is caused by dynamics in the interaction with other spaces. In this paper we argue that, considered from a dynamic perspective, the emergence of soft spaces next to hard spaces, invokes an in-between space which is not geographic, but rather performative. We coin the term 'in-betweening' as the activity to switch and bridge between multiple harder and softer spaces by focusing on what regional planners 'actually do' when they are confronted with an accumulation of spaces. We argue that combining softer and harder spaces increase the problem-solving potential, that tensions between different spaces are structural and vital and that practitioners acting 'in-between' are crucial to deal with these tensions.

Key words: regional planning, soft space, problem-orientation, tension, practices of in-betweening

1. Introduction

In 2014 administrators and policymakers from a ministry and a province in the Netherlands invited participants from several municipalities, housing corporations, research institutions, real estate investors and developers to work together to revamp the urban regeneration strategy for the Southern part of the Dutch Randstad conurbation. This invitation came at a moment that organizations realized that they could not find solutions via the well-established approaches. This was particularly true now the consensus was that cities should increase their density and safeguard the remaining green spaces in the crowded Randstad as much as possible. Yet building in inner-cities stagnated and generated complex issues regarding transportation, parking, energy efficiency, building costs and dispersed ownership of land and real estate. Consequently, the actors agreed to embark on an experiment to use novel ways to collaborate and find innovative solutions. Facilitators were named to guide the informal collaborative process, meetings were organized and many ideas and initiatives were born. However, the governmental organizations involved had a long history in (formal) collaboration on infrastructural projects already. They developed extensive procedures, rules and routines and continued to operate in their own separate setting. Although the new, experimental and informal approach produced meaningful outcomes according to the participants, the governmental officials of the formal second approach did not recognize these as solutions for their regional problem. Yet

accelerating urban housing became more urgent and several actors worked on an Urban Agenda executed through 'city deals' with new playing rules and responsibilities. With this, a third approach was born. The three collaborative approaches consequently and simultaneously co-existed, but struggled in their interaction.

The regional level is often conceived a central scale in solving complex social problems (Albrechts, 2010). For these problems organizations need to mobilize the problem-solving potential of other actors involved (Healey, 2006; Cropper et al., 2008). "In the Netherlands (but also elsewhere) this primarily occurs at the level of urban regions, where the most intense forms of deliberation and negotiation on issues of policy integration take place" (Zonneveld and Spaans, 2014, p544). As a result the field of regional planning, formerly dominated by public organizations, is now increasingly influenced by business, social and civic actors (Boelens, 2010). This growing occupancy of organizations has led to a growing fragmentation (Hajer, 2009). Haughton et al. (2013) observed that "over the last two decades the nature of spatial governance has changed dramatically, both quantitatively […] and qualitatively in the ways in which multiple networks of actors are continuously made and remade to carry forward particular strategies" (p217). In this growing variety of collaborative approaches, many observe an increasing emergence of informal and experimental arrangements (Lemke, 2002; Van der Steen et al., 2015; Powell and Soppe, 2015; Almendinger et al., 2015). Haughton et al. (2013) presume that "whilst planners have always worked informally and sought to coordinate activities arranged across multiple forms of administrative geographies […], what we are seeing is in fact distinctive, new and still evolving" (p.221). It therefore comes as no surprise that when studying the strategic plans of public organizations, they aspire to collaborate in new informal ways, stimulating partnerships, networks, labs and communities (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014; Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2016). Nonetheless, in practice actors experience disincentives as interorganizational collaboration is seen as an inherently difficult activity due to dynamics caused by divergent interests, opposing approaches and conflicting perspectives (Gray, 2008; Huxham, 2003; Human and Provan, 2000; Ospina and Saz-Carranza, 2010). The above described empirical context is therefore no exception to the present-day increase in quantity and diversity of collaborating actors and collaborative approaches that co-exist around a regional problem. And no exception to the struggle of creating accepted and embedded results across organizations and approaches.

However, studies that focus on the variety in collaborative approaches around the same problem, the interaction between these and the way this influences the collective problem-solving potential are limited. The leading question of this paper is therefore: *How to understand the collaboration across organizations in dealing with complex regional problems?* To answer this question we draw on the concept of 'soft spaces' as introduced and elaborated by Allmendinger and Haughton (2007; 2009; 2010). They consider soft spaces as new informal forms of territorial governance with blurred boundaries that arise as a response to hard spaces; existing, statutory and formal spaces of government. Analyzing regional planning processes through the lens of this concept is powerful. Yet we argue that we can enhance our understanding of present-day regional planning by taking the conceptualizing of soft spaces further. Especially, because soft space scholars observe a proliferation of soft spaces, but also observe a limited impact of contemporary soft space approaches (Allmendinger et al., 2015). We argue more attention is needed for the interactive dynamics in regional planning, within which both 'hard' formal spaces and 'soft' informal spaces are implicated. As described in the above empirical situation, different 'spaces' were involved in tackling the same problem, but there was only little interaction between them which limited their impact in effectively dealing with the regional problem. We adopt a dynamic perspective to investigate the way practitioners are dealing with the interaction between overlapping and concurrent 'harder' and 'softer' spaces. Not to eliminate, resolve or minimize these dynamics, although this is a regular reflex of practitioners and scholars (Hajer and Laws, 2006), but to work with and exploit the dynamics.

With the focus on interactive dynamics a different kind of space comes in view. We call this a performative space where the tensions between the different collaborative approaches are experienced and dealt with and where new practices of governance get enacted. A performance perspective puts the analytical lens on the 'work' that is being done in concrete situations in which understandings of dynamics are performed or enacted (Hajer & Pelzer 2018; Hajer, 2009). To investigate the way in which planning practices are enacted in the in-between space we apply insights from 'practice theory' as an approach that emphasizes the interactive, context-bound character of activities (Hajer 1995, 2009; Wagenaar and Cook, 2003; Shove et al., 2012). In practice theory, dynamics are understood through acting (Rein, 1983) and practitioners develop professional standards and repertoires while working (Lynch, 2004; MacIntyre, 1985). Practice scholars focus therefore on the practical activities, judgements and interpretations of the day to day struggle of practitioners in dynamic contexts (Lipsky, 2010). We use the conflict-sensitive orientation to practice theory as defined by Nicolini (2017). This allows us to investigate the co-evolution, conflict and interference of contrasting harder and softer spaces. Nicolini observes that a focus on conflict is used infrequently, yet paradoxically, this focus on tensions and contradictions often trigger new insights in dealing with the actual dynamics. Empirically this requires access to the detailed accounts of practitioners. This article draws on the privileged access of the first author who, as consultant, conducted 25 interviews to evaluate the experiences in planning with hard and soft spaces in the Randstad South region. She has been active as reflective practitioner for many years in a variety of collaborative approaches at different levels. She has experienced the conflict-ridden context herself, but she has also coached practitioners and guided organizational change trajectories to better deal with collaborative dynamics. As Dewey (1910) and later Schön (1983) formulated, reflection is the practitioner's unique encounter and conversation with a situation through which "he shapes it and makes himself part of it" (Schön 1983, p. 163). And as Johns (2017, p. 13) puts it "knowing in action is intuitive drawing on tacit knowledge". This approach follows up on the suggestion of Allmendinger et al. (2014), which has not yet been executed by soft space scholars themselves, that for further empirical testing an in-vivo perspective would be valuable (p. 2714).

In this paper we first explore the prevailing conceptualization of soft spaces. In the section that follows we reconceptualize this by investigating in the problem-solving potential of combining multiple spaces, the structural and vital role of tensions between different spaces and the personal impact of dealing with these tensions. In the fourth section we illustrate our theoretical positionings with the case of urban regeneration as briefly introduced at the start of this paper. This case provides a good opportunity to explore the in-between dynamics, because a new informal space emerged, that did not replace the more familiar space and evoked in turn another space, allowing us insights in (un)productive practices of in-betweening. This reflection leads, finally, to the suggestion for orderings and a proposed research agenda that more thoroughly investigates in the in-between dynamics.

2. The concept of soft space

The concept of 'soft space' was introduced by Haughton and Allmendinger (2007) to capture the phenomenon of new informal government arrangements in the British and Irish context under the New Labour government (see also Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). Since then the concept has been wider applied in comparative work in spatial planning and territorial management in Europe (Allmendinger et al., 2014, 2015; Haughton et al., 2010, 2013; Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Stead, 2014). Soft space became framed in a context of metagovernance (Jessop, 2004; Haughton et al., 2010), neoliberal spatial and state restructuring (Cochrane, 2012; Haughton et al., 2013) and policy integration in the European Union (Chilla, et al., 2012; Faludi, 2013). Important themes were administrative reform, decentralization, competitive localism and territorial governance. It is well

recognized that the emergence of soft spaces relates to the loss of steering capacity of forms of networked territorial governance that are organized around fixed scales and boundaries in this more complex relational world (Zonneveld and Spaans, 2014; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). Purkarthofer (2018) similarly states that regional planning today is increasingly dealing with new scales that emerge outside the formalized planning system. Against the background of the limits of statutory planning, soft spaces are seen as a result of "[…] a policy impetus to break away from the shackles of pre-existing working patterns which might be variously held to be slow, bureaucratic or not reflecting the real geographies of problems and opportunities" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009, p. 619).

Despite the substantial resonance of the concept, definitions and manifestations of soft space vary. Examples given by Allmendinger et al. (2015) are the Hamburg Metropolitan Region, the Sillon Lorrain, the Fehrman Belt or the Upper Rhine. Despite the different manifestations some key characteristics can be derived from the work of soft space scholars. Soft spaces are mainly regional spatial concepts or regional entities (which regularly coincide) for mostly urbanized areas between the local and national scale (sometimes across national boundaries). Soft spaces, thus conceived, can emerge by coincidence or evolve in a strategic and intentional way, either initiated from the national or European level (top-down) or from the local level (bottom-up). They involve diverse mixes of actors, including government, civil society and the private sector. They are, according to Allmendinger et al. (2015), by nature experimental, intended to provide testing grounds for new policy interventions. Soft spaces are therefore "often counterposed against what might be termed the 'hard', statutory spaces of government; formal territorial units of government typically with legally defined and definite territorial boundaries linked to administrative structure of subnational government, and to democratic electoral processes" (Haughton et al., 2013, p. 218). Soft spaces "[…] exist alongside but separate to the spaces and scales of elected government bodies such as local, regional and national government. Whilst some governance spaces can be coterminous with the territorial boundaries of elected government, soft spaces by contrast involve the creation of new geographies that transcend existing political administrative boundaries" (Allmendinger et al., 2015, p.4). Considering these characteristics we here briefly define soft spaces as 'informal collaborative arrangements governed by a horizontal logic of improvisation' (see figure 1 for a geographic visualization of the differences between soft and hard space).

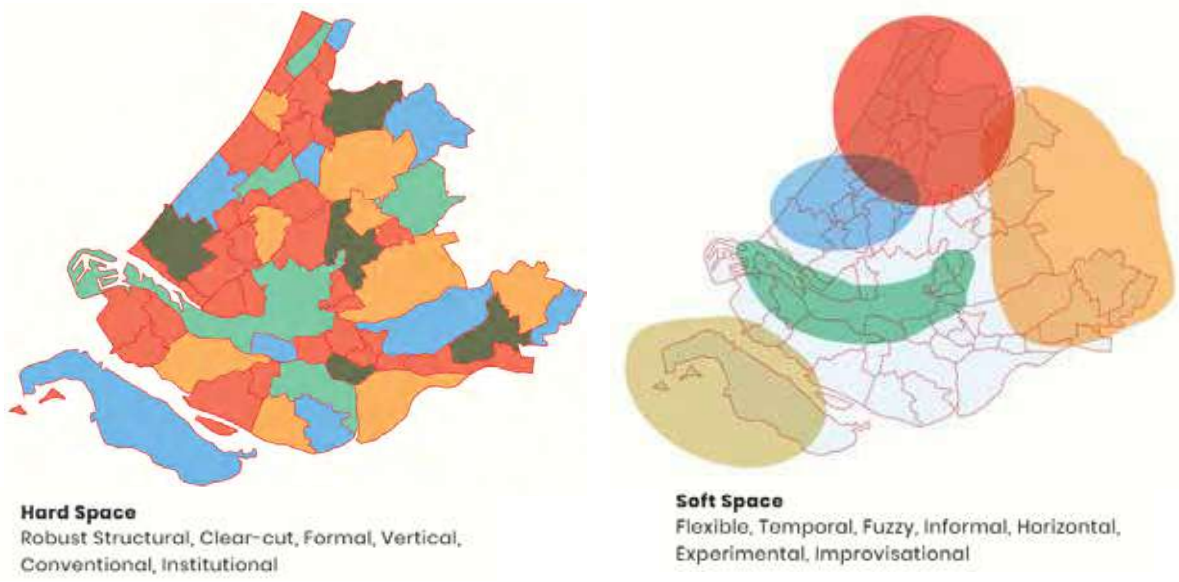

Figure 1. Geographic visualization of differences soft space and hard space (source: authors' own illustration).

Soft space scholars note several aspects on the positive value and impact of soft spaces for regional planning, in the context of the limitations of politics conducted in (pre-)existing hard spaces. Soft spaces are frequently set up to either address the mismatch between administrative and functional areas or to promote the identity of a chosen geography with new imaginaries that change and influence existing perspectives. Through this, soft spaces can help set geographical, institutional and financial conditions, for example to compete with other regions for national and European funds or to establish informal knowledge networks among policy-makers and practitioners (Allmendinger et al., 2015). The often temporary nature of soft spaces allows for a new momentum. Longer term effects of soft spaces are in the prevailing conceptualization captured speaking of 'hardening' and 'softening' stages, suggesting they can become more structural in their presence when cooperation processes, partnerships and governance arrangements that started with soft spaces may continue to exist over time (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Allmendinger et al., 2014). Haughton et al. (2013) state that "Soft spaces have played an important role in mediating and translating neoliberalism, providing flexible and ephemeral experimental spaces and alternatives to costly and disruptive reorganization of hard, statutory spaces" (p.227). Soft spaces are mostly low cost approaches and offer flexibility which implies room to manoeuvre, creating "a space for experimentation that local, regional or national authorities with official planning competencies do not possess. They also allow deniability if such politically sensitive solutions do not work" (Allmendinger et al., 2015, p.225). The authors conclude that successful soft spaces accept and include the heterogeneity of actors on a pragmatic basis and consciously avoid a formal geography. They promote flexible or blurred boundaries instead.

Linked to the positive evaluations the authors also raise serious concerns. They describe the democratic deficit of soft spaces, as democratic structures and processes might be circumvented, accountability outsourced to those running the new bodies and that less glamorous areas of policy might become marginalized (Allmendinger et al., 2015). Haughton et al. (2013) observe that soft spaces are used as a sidestep for existing political, legal or administrative spaces, and are often literally used to evade difficult issues. They also observe that "soft spaces have been the vehicle for a series of narrowly conceived experiments in promoting different forms of high economic growth, albeit in rather disconnected fashion, such that different soft spaces might have contradictory and rather loose aims" (p.231). Allmendinger et al. (2015) add to this by describing "[…] even if they appear to have achieved some measure of success, sometimes a soft space organization's very existence could have stymied alternative forms of change that might have been even more successful" (p.224). "[…] there is little or no evidence from any of our case studies that soft spaces are somehow more effective, producing speedier or better-quality outcomes. This is in part because they necessarily still rely on using the statutory planning systems to get most large-scale development projects approved […]." (p.233). Olesen (2012) even observes that soft spaces were not able to fill in the gaps between formal scales of planning and increase pressures on hard spaces. In their final conclusions Allmendinger et al. (2015) state that soft spaces work best when they try to find solutions for particular boundary effects with hard spaces instead of ducking "[…] awkward issues around who is in and who is out of particular arrangements, what is being negotiated over and what is being excluded from consideration, and the patterns of winners and losers that necessarily stem from such selectivities" (p.234).

3. In-between multiple harder and softer spaces

We concur that the realities of regional planning can be meaningfully analyzed in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' spaces. However, we are intrigued by the finding that authors observe a limited impact of soft spaces in actual planning processes. We suggest that this limitation may be caused by dynamics in the interaction with other spaces. Harder and softer spaces appear to constrain and compete with each other instead of reinforcing and completing each other. Considering the prevailing conceptualization

relatively little is known about the relationship between hard and soft space, how they can work in tandem and how practitioners deal with a multiplicity of spaces and hybridized forms of softer and harder spaces (Allmendinger et al., 2015). In the light of the growing emergence of softer spaces and the remaining presence of harder spaces, we argue that dealing with the interaction between multiple overlapping and concurrent spaces will only become more imperative. Starting from an appreciation of the complexities of regional planning (De Roo and Boelens, 2016) and following a practice approach (Shove et al., 2012) we suggest we may have to interpret the interaction between softer and harder spaces from a dynamic perspective, focusing on the fabric or space in-between. We foreground three theoretical positionings that help deepen our understanding of the interactive dynamics: (1) the problem-solving potential of multiple spaces; (2) the structural and vital tensions between different spaces; and (3) the impact of individual practitioners in dealing with tensions.

The problem-solving potential of multiple spaces

Empirical research illustrates the difficulty for organizations and especially public organizations to respond effectively to complex problems (Kettl, 2009; Head and Alford, 2015; Boelens, 2010). Complex problems are hard to define, contested by different actors, interrelated to other problems and identified by uncertainty (Termeer et al., 2015; Ney and Verweij, 2015). Multi-actor, multi-sector and multi-level collaboration is increasingly highlighted as a key driver for creating innovative solutions for these kind of problems (Davy, 2012; Hartmann, 2011; Ney, 2009; Verweij, 2011; Innes, 2016; Sørensen and Torfing, 2014; Buijs et al.2018, Termeer et al., 2015). The multiplicity of cross-over interactions is particularly important, because the added value of collaborating becomes greater when actors think and work differently (Schruijer and Vansina, 2008). In this respect, the (variety in) involved actors and the collaborative approach chosen for should follow the degree of complexity of the problem (Gray, 1989; De Roo, 2001). This contrasts the often employed way of working with predefined tasks and structures. When problem solving is central in the work that needs to be done, organizational structures and arrangements are not set; collaborative formats differ per situation (Teisman et al., 2018). Furthermore, different actors will have different interpretations of what is the problem and will have different preferences that influence the choice of approach (Lubell, 2003; Van der Steen et al.,2015).

Accordingly, multiple approaches are consequently and simultaneously possible for a specific regional problem. However, we observe a shift towards new, informal and improvisational spatial planning approaches as the appropriate way to deal with complex problems and a move away from more classical, formal and institutional approaches (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011; Termeer, 2009; Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2005). Soft space scholars tend to also highlight these new constellations of actors coming together (Allmendinger et al., 2015). Following Zuidema (2011) we argue that complexity is a reason for an increased plurality of collaborative approaches and that classical, formal approaches can act as a crucial foundation for new informal approaches. Thus, solving complex regional problems does not only raise the need for informal collaborative approaches, but merely the combination of and interaction between different approaches. Whereas soft space scholars consider soft spaces as the outcome of a thoroughgoing critique of hard spaces and its failure to deliver (Allmendinger et al., 2015), we rather focus on the strengths and values of harder spaces complementary to softer spaces, because considering ‘the new’ as a disqualification of ‘the old’, would stimulate unproductive and defensive reactions (Termeer, 2009). With respect to this, Lawrence et al. (2002) disclosed that collaborations that are highly embedded, which is the degree to which a collaboration is enmeshed in other interorganizational relationships (Dacin et al., 1999; Granovetter, 1985), are more likely to diffuse innovations beyond the boundaries of the collaboration. According to Lawrence et al. (2002) organizations that focus solely on their partners, at the expense of the connection with the broader interorganizational network, may secure competitive advantages, but forego the opportunity to effect more fundamental change: A common concern amongst soft space scholars (Allmendinger et al., 2015; Olesen, 2012).

When carrying forward this line of reasoning, it is fruitful for effective problem-solving to focus on *multiple spaces that emerge around the same problem*. However, the prevailing conceptualization of soft spaces puts the focus on the *hard and soft spaces that exist in one region concerning multiple problems*. Putting problems central allows us to appreciate how actors dance through the scales and when and how actors from different levels are involved (Teisman et al.,2018). More importantly still, it allows us to better focus on the interactive dynamics between spaces. With this focus a more performative, in-between space comes into view in which the actual interaction between spaces takes place and where the combination of these interactions together has certain effects. It shows resemblance to the work of Soja (1996) on the concept of 'third space' where different qualities add up to a new, unknown, third quality. The in-between space that arises out of the interaction between softer and harder spaces cannot be marked on a geographical map, but rather on a mental map. The in-between space is a performative space, but on certain interactive moments it can reveal itself when meetings are organized between the different harder and softer spaces. Allmendinger et al. (2015), however, raise concerns for overlapping spaces with different competencies that might lead to inefficiency, mistrust and tensions. Our hypothesis is that multiple collaborative spaces around the same regional problem can enhance the problem-solving capacity and that it are exactly the tensions between the divergent collaborative approaches that enable this to happen.

The structural and vital tensions between different spaces

In the prevailing conceptualization soft spaces exist next to, but outside hard spaces as separate realities (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). In practice soft spaces are often deployed as workarounds and sidesteps to avoid conflicts with hard spaces (Allmendinger et al., 2015). From a complexity perspective the dynamics of a system are exactly characterized by its relationships and interactions and these can only be understood by taking into account the parts, the whole and the context (Cilliers, 1998: 4; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Teisman et al, 2009). Using a dynamic perspective we therefore reveal both conflicting types of spaces as part of one reality. Lewis and Smith (2014) likewise suggest that in conflict-ridden situations we need to move from 'either/or'-debates to 'both/and'-perspectives that engage opposing approaches simultaneously. They herewith stress the value of a paradox lens and define a paradox as contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist continuously and simultaneously. The opposing elements of a paradox are therefore in a permanent state of tension, for example, between formal and informal cultures, institutional and improvisational approaches or mechanistic and organic structures. Lewis and Smith describe that researchers have long responded to these tensions by identifying conditions under which organizations or practitioners should attend to the one side or to the other side. However, nowadays different authors describe the reflexive character and ineffectiveness of this strategy to repress or avoid paradoxes in satisfying our need for consistency and uncertainty reduction (Derksen, 2016; Jay, 2012; Lewis, 2000; Smith and Tushman, 2005). In contrast, paradox scholars consider paradoxes as persistent unsolvable puzzles fostering the existence of the tension and fueling the interplay between the two poles to achieve long term success (Derksen, 2016).

Next to the fact that tensions between new, informal and improvisational approaches and classical, formal and institutional approaches are structural, they are also vital (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Rauws and De Jong, 2019). While tensions often complicate collaboration, the coexistence of opposing values contributes to a system's capacity for change (De Roo, 2017). Seo and Creed (2002) likewise state that inconsistencies, contradictions and tensions are enablers of change. Shove and Walker (2007) and Van Meerkerk (2014) both show that change takes place through processes of co-evolution and mutual adaptation within and between arrangements. Powell and Soppe (2015, p.770) confirm this: "Organizational forms can be conceived of as assemblages of elements

and practices. For newness to occur, existing templates and ideas must flow together and be recombined in novel ways, and integrated into the social world. […] Such generative dynamics frequently occur when otherwise distant social arenas are brought together. Structural spaces between multiple networks have a high potential for foreign material and elements to flow together and become repurposed and rearranged to form a fresh constellation." In this view tensions are seen as an opportunity and invitation for creativity and unconventional lines of thought (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011). Also Cameron (1986) describes that if there are no tensions, an unproductive and schizophrenic situation may arise. In contrast to soft space scholars we thus perceive tensions between spaces not as something negative and something to avoid or resolve (Allmendinger et al., 2014), but as something positive and something to exploit. By bringing harder and softer spaces around the same problem into the same reality, tensions are not unexpected, incontrollable external intruders, but expected and manageable parts of the process.

However, this does not imply that dealing with tensions between new, informal and improvisational approaches and classical, formal and institutional approaches is easy. The embeddedness of soft spaces also complicates innovation (Termeer, 2009). Alter and Hage (1993) show that not only individual organizations institutionalize, interorganizational activity is affected in a similar fashion. Particular collaborative approaches may become the widely accepted and understood default approach for how actors work together around a specific problem. In the in-between space where harder and softer approaches assemble, the tension between new and classical scripts of working is preeminently experienced. Here, the impact of soft spaces on hard spaces resembles the transformative process of niche dynamics on existing regimes to change (Kemp et al, 1998; Raven, 2006). Hosking (2004) describes that once a particular pattern becomes stabilized, the other possibilities may be harder to have them validated as relevant and good. Van der Steen et al., (2015) call this a distortion of the process of choice, because current (institutionalized) ways of working might prevent actors from choosing new ways. Termeer (2009) illustrates that as a result many public managers talk the talk of new informal and improvisational approaches but in practice get entangled in all kinds of barriers and revert to more familiar, traditional strategies. As stressed by different authors dealing with these and related tensions asks for specific personal skills to "[…] create a whole new system of meaning that ties the functioning of disparate sets of institutions together […]" and "[…] bridge what have come to be called the 'old' and 'new' […]" (Garud et al., 2007, p. 957).

The impact of individual practitioners in dealing with tensions

Wiliams (2002) observes that the discourse about collective complex problem solving is positioned at an institutional and organizational level and comparatively little attention is accorded to the pivotal role of individual actors. The same applies for the soft space literature in which scholars have a strong focus on the emergence of the phenomenon and have largely neglected the impact of individual practitioners. However, they do suggest that tensions in how relationships are aligned and managed will arise and that it depends on individual actors whether they try to survive by competing or by developing complementing roles (Allmendinger et al., 2015). In different ways *interorganizational* collaboration studies have paid regard to the role of individual actors. By referring to for example 'brokers' (Gray, 2008) or 'mediators' (Susskind, 2008) the connecting role of individuals across organizational boundaries is explored. The term 'boundary spanners' was originally focused on the connecting role within an organization (Tushman and Scanlan, 1998), but was later oriented to the interactions between the organization and its environment in order to realize a better 'fit'" (Van Meerkerk, 2014; Baker, 2008). Considering the above described context of multiple spaces around a regional problem, we share the crucial role of individual actors in *intraorganizational* and *interorganizational* collaboration. Yet, we argue that their role between multiple harder and softer spaces (on the *intercollaborational* level) is little exposed and understudied. While, practitioners in-between multiple spaces have to deal with all these interactions separately and simultaneously. Ospina and Saz-Carranze (2010) also describe that in successful collaborations the inward work (between

organizations) and outward work (between the collaboration and external actors) is done concurrently rather than sequentially.

We here consider the inward and outward activity, as 'in-betweening' and the individuals performing this activity as 'in-betweeners' (see table 1 for an overview of the concepts of in-betweenness). To be able to specify different practices of in-betweening we here define a practice as a coherent setting in time and place with actors performing an organized set of doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2017). These can be both a productive or unproductive practice. According to Cooper action does not take place inside or outside boundaries, but in the midst of things (Burrell and Parker, 2016). In this in-between setting the impact of the repertoire and behavior of individual actors increases: they are themselves instruments to switch and bridge between spaces (Vermeulen, 2012). Furthermore, Kivimaa et al. (2019) describe that intermediary actors can be key catalysts that speed up change and transition. However, when a situation is ambiguous professionals experience unease when they cannot 'read' a situation and choose readily among alternatives (Bauman, 1991). Also Argyris (1996) showed that we have developed defensive mechanisms and routines when contradictions threaten to undermine the harmony and consistency. Darling and Walker (2001) describe that backup behavioral styles come into focus as responses to high level of stress and conflict: "An individual's primary backup style is a predictable yet unconscious shift to more extreme, rigid and non-negotiable behaviors" (p.237). According to Darling and Walker backup behaviors seem to relieve tensions, but are usually counterproductive for the individuals using them. A more reflective way of acting requires the ability to deal with contrasting viewpoints, actions, and intentions (Le Grand, 2007; Noordegraaf, 2007), to create optimal conflict levels (De Dreu, 2006) and in the words of Miron-Spektor et al. (2011) to adopt a paradoxical frame to identify contradictory elements, to explore their linkages and to find and test alternative solutions. Akkerman et al. (2006) also state that it requires people to have dialogues with actors of different spaces or organizations, but also to have inner dialogues between different perspectives they are able to take on.

According to Darling and Walker (2001) style flexibility is a key to interacting more effectively in conflict situations. In-betweeners therefore have to be conscious about their own style, the style of others and have to be able to broaden their own style or repertoire of actions to adapt to the different settings (Grant, 2016). In our perspective switching and bridging softer and harder spaces requires switching and bridging between 'harder' (formal and institutional) and 'softer' (informal and improvisational) styles or repertoires. Walker and Nocon (2007) define this as 'boundary-crossing competences', which is the "ability to manage and integrate multiple, divergent discourses and practices across social boundaries" (Walker and Nocon, p.181). The in-betweener can be considered as a special type of boundary worker (Metze, 2010; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). Professionals at boundaries "enter onto territory in which we are unfamiliar and, to some significant extent therefore unqualified" (Suchman 1994, p25). They "face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts to achieve hybrid situations" (Engelström et al. 1995, p319). This resonates with the later work of Lawrence et al. (2011) on 'institutional work' in which they describe "myriad, day-to-day equivocal instances of agency that, although aimed at affecting the institutional order, represent a complex mélange of forms of agency - successful and not, simultaneously radical and conservative, strategic and emotional, full of compromises, and rife with unintended consequences" (p. 52-53). Switching and bridging between spaces therefore requires continuous reflection on what in-betweeners do and who they are (Johns, 2017): The signs to read a situation "[…] are often subtle, requiring perception, imagination and intuition. There are no prescriptive solutions" (p.13). Appreciating this difficult position and stressing the need for skills of adaptivity and switching capacity could in our perspective be crucial for stimulating the interaction between spaces and the impact and embeddedness of soft spaces.

Table 1. Concepts of in-betweenness

In-betweenness highlights the interconnections between multiple softer and harder spaces		
Term		**Definition**
In-between space	Playing field	The performative space in which the interactions and tensions between multiple harder and softer spaces around a regional problem becomes manifest
In-betweener	Player	The individual practitioner that switches and bridges between different spaces and works on the intra-organizational, interorganizational and intercollaborational level
In-betweening	Interplay	The outward and inward activity of switching and bridging within and between different spaces while constantly adapting one's style
In-between dynamics	Dramaturgy	The inward, outward and intermediate dynamics that cause ambiguity and tensions

4. In-betweening in the case of urban regeneration

The case of defining strategies for urban regeneration in the Randstad South region constitutes an interesting case to study the interaction between multiple spaces. We studied the interactive dynamics between a new soft space and several other harder and softer spaces in the period 2014 (when the housing market was in a crisis situation) to 2016 (when the housing market was overheated). The first author was involved in the soft space as an evaluator of and reflector on the collaborative process allowing for an in-depth case-study. To enhance our understanding of the interactive dynamics we conducted qualitative research: events were attended to observe the interaction, regular meetings were held with the facilitators of the soft space to stimulate reflection and feedback, a document analysis of official letters, reports and newsletters produced by the different spaces were conducted, stories of 25 different participants of the multiple spaces were collected through interviews to produce 'thick descriptions' on practical judgements and interpretations made, and finally a focus group was organized to combine and test our initial findings. In this section we first describe the context of the multiple harder and softer spaces and highlight three collaborative spaces that acted as 'stages' for practices of in-betweening around the same regional problem.

Multiple harder and softer spaces

The 'Randstad' refers to the most urbanized western part of the country where 8.1 million people live and work and where a gross regional product of 367 billion is produced, which is more than half of the Dutch economic activity and which makes it the fourth-largest metropolitan region in Europe (Randstad Region, 2017). While interactions transgress municipal borders, the Dutch system does not foresee in regional planning authorities (House of representatives, 2012). So planning issues in the Randstad require collaboration among many municipalities, three provinces and several national ministries. Based on regional economic analysis the northern Randstad (focused around Amsterdam and Utrecht) is now often approached separately from the southern Randstad (focused around Rotterdam and The Hague). A major problem in the southern region is the stagnation of building houses in inner-city areas. Research shows that about 80% of the inhabitants of the southern Randstad would like to live in urban areas (MIRT-onderzoek, 2014). This results in an expected need to house 230.000 households in the region by 2030 and a need to build 200.000 houses by that time. Despite the massive need for new urban units, only few initiatives for inner-city housing projects are taken. The constraining factors are not clear-cut and extent to many different (policy) fields. Amongst others, there is a search for new business models to overcome the investment gap, for understanding the specific housing needs of target groups, for adjusted national and local regulations, for new parking and mobility solutions and for new sustainable and energy efficient concepts. If nothing

changes the estimated shortage in the urban segment amounts to 85.000 households by 2025 (MIRT-onderzoek, 2014). This situation can rightfully be perceived as a complex regional problem.

In 2014 the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs and the province of South-Holland agreed that the building of new housing stock in the urban areas was stagnant and that change would require action from a range of interdependent actors. Acting on this awareness they started a bottom-up collaborative process inviting over a hundred actors, ranging from municipalities, housing corporations and research institutions to real estate investors and developers (MIRT-onderzoek, 2014). This new soft space is the starting point for our research. Up until then they did not share knowledge and experiences. Yet the call for collaboration was clear. The aim was to come to a collective understanding of the problem and devise strategies to overcome the blockages for urban densification. However, the default approach of the national, regional and local governmental actors involved, was to formally regulate regional collaboration with extensive procedures, rules and routines, often directed by the Ministry for Infrastructure and Environment. The newly introduced space did not replace this more familiar space and evoked in turn another space. While acting most participants were not always aware of the different embedded spaces. Yet, when evaluating the collaboration process, they started to unravel the three spaces that had the most impact on their work and vice versa (some participants were involved in more spaces like for example the 'watertorenberaad', but these three were most often named and seen as interconnected). Figure 2 represents these multiple harder and softer spaces. The spaces were present in broadly the same period and involved similar organizations, but often in different roles and with different practitioners. When we would use the general definition of soft spaces set up by Allmendinger et al. (2015) not only the first space, but all three spaces could be defined as a soft space whereas they all have fuzzy boundaries and are a way to collaborate with multiple actors on the regional level of the southern Randstad. Yet in these three different spaces very different approaches were enacted representing a spectrum of harder and softer approaches.

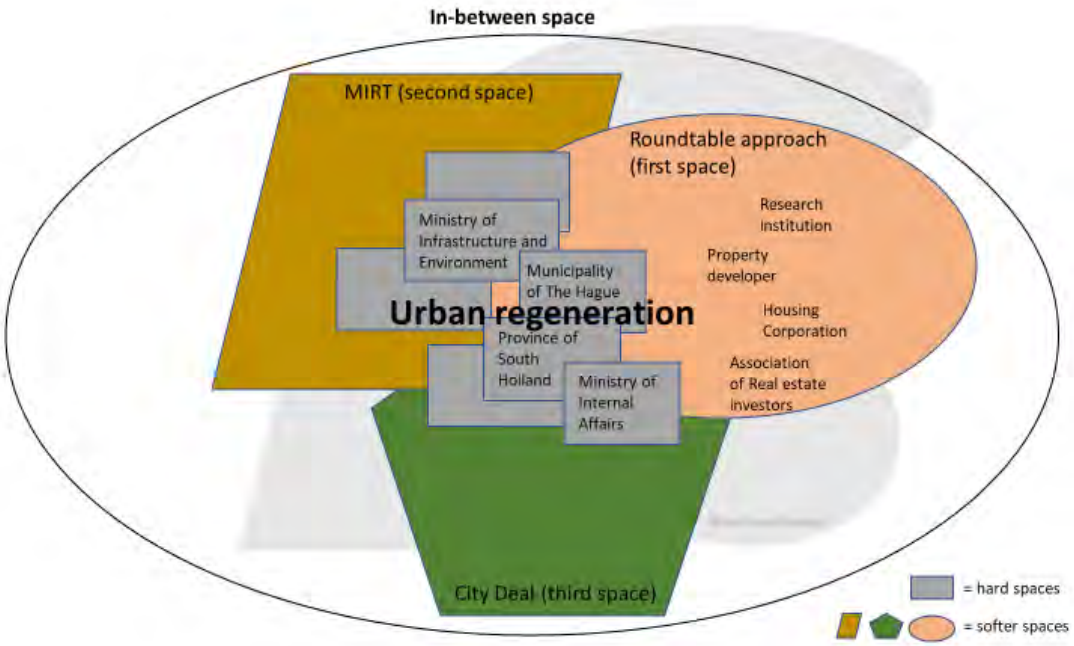

Figure 2. Visualization of the multiple harder and softer spaces for the case of Urban regeneration (source: authors' own illustration).

Roundtable approach (first space)

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the province of South Holland offered each a facilitator to guide the collaborative process. They selected five themes for pilots employing a so called 'table-approach'.

The tables were asked to illustrate the obstacles they experienced and were encouraged to suggest creative solutions for their theme. For each table an independent chairperson with a private, social or academic background was appointed. A civil servant from one of the involved public organizations was assigned to support him or her. The chairperson got a list of possible participants with diverse backgrounds but was also stimulated to invite participants from his or her own network. Next to this, people were able to invite themselves to the table. The process was open to everyone who wanted to join, as long as they (1) had something to contribute in solving the problem, (2) were able to organize themselves and (3) were open to reflect on their own agenda and interests. With this the conditions for a new soft space were born. At first mainly associations and platform organizations joined, but during the process more individual member organizations and entrepreneurs started to join as well. From September till December 2014 four big general meetings were organized by the facilitators for all five tables to exchange knowledge, get inspired and discuss the theme at hand. The facilitators hired reporters to make notes. People not involved in or committed to the pilots could sit in on these general meetings. In 2015 the approach was organized more loosely and informally and twelve tables became active on a diversity of themes. Each table was expected to deliver a concrete advice, without the format being specified aforehand. Consequently, each table had its own style and pace of working. Sometimes the 'official' informal process was overtaken by initiatives from people not committed to one of the tables. An example of such an initiative was 'p-matching' set up by three diverse participants that organized local sessions to match possible housing locations and possible investors and developers.

MIRT (second space)

The second space can be considered as the formal collaboration between the governmental organizations that have a history of about twenty-five years in the long-term national government investment program for infrastructural, spatial and transport projects called MIRT (Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport). It started in the beginning of the 90s under the name MIT as appendix to the Infrastructure fund in the national budgetary framework for only infrastructural and transport projects. To stimulate integrated policies and coherence in regional investments in 2008 it was broadened to MIRT by adding also spatial projects. Through the years MIRT became an institutionalized way of collaborating. The content of the program is described in an annual MIRT project book, which is presented to the parliament on the third Tuesday of September each year. These projects are based on regional strategic agenda's and have a fixed sequence of steps in their development: MIRT-research, MIRT-exploration and MIRT-plan. The way of working is described in the MIRT playing rules. Decisions about the course and finance of the projects are made once or twice a year in an administrative gathering per region (BO MIRT), like the Southern part of the Randstad, where all involved ministers, deputies and aldermen come together. These gatherings are carefully prepared by civil servants from the involved public organizations and are directed by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. Because of the institutional approach this collaborative space is highly influenced by hard space characteristics. In 2014 the ministry accepted the downsides of their 'harder' approach, which was considered to be too rigid, time-consuming and bureaucratic for tackling the increasingly complex regional problems and the growing amount of involved actors (MIRT, 2016). A program to renew or 'soften' the approach of collaboration was launched with a broader view on problems, involved parties and possible solutions (MIRT, 2016). This was supposed to pave the way for the soft space approach in the first space.

City deal (third space)

At the same time in 2015, three ministries presented an Urban Agenda to strengthen the economic growth, innovation and livability in Dutch cities as catalysts of the national economy (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2015). This Urban Agenda is executed through 'City Deals' on important themes for transition. These deals are concrete agreements between public, private and social organizations on solving urban problems,

but also on learning from new ways of collaborating. Originally the private and social sector was supposed to be leading and the public sector was supposed to be facilitating (PBL, 2017). In practice, however, all sectors took their equal responsibilities. One of the deals made was the 'City Deal Building and Transforming Inner-cities' (Binnenstedelijk bouwen en transformatie). In the beginning of 2016 the City Deal was signed by seventeen organizations in the Southern part of the Randstad and a third collaborative space was born (City deal, 2016). The organizations committed to the common goals specified and for each organization their contribution to the goals was made explicit. Important in this City Deal were the seven municipalities that selected a pilot area and had to be open on the real-estate interests and investments. These pilots were partly based on the results of the first space. This third space was characterized by many soft space elements, however some elements were slightly 'harder' when the governmental organizations involved were called on their constitutional tasks.

The experienced value of the first soft space approach

The recognition of the complexity of the problem made that the initiators explicitly chose for a new, informal and improvisational soft approach in the first space. The respondents were very well aware of the fact that they needed different actors across usual and unusual sectors and levels to find solutions. The initiator from the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated about this:

> "We wanted the collaborative process to become a festivity which is fun to contribute to, but we decided that it could not be a governmental party, like it mostly is on themes like infrastructure and water management. In the housing sector it are organizations outside the government that develop and create. We invited the private sector at the first meeting already. I remember the meeting still very well. The whole venue was packed. We were nervous whether private parties wanted to join, but we had no doubt that this was the right approach for dealing with our housing problem" [Respondent 20]

A right-hand man of a chairperson from the housing field emphasized the importance of the diverse disciplines and actors in this approach to solve the complex problem:

> "Actually, I didn't want to speak to people from 'housing'. If you want to change something, you need other actors. That is why this was such a good process. With our group we combined accessibility, mobility and housing and translated an international guideline for transit-oriented development" [Respondent 8]

During the meetings many surprising and spontaneous encounters happened that would otherwise not have taken place:

> "At a certain point I walked around on a very vague meeting and I bumped into someone that is the exact opposite of me. A very entrepreneurial type. We started talking and before we knew, we were making exciting plans. I would have never met a person like him, if these meetings were not organized" [Respondent 17]

However, participants did have to get used to the soft approach as a respondent from the institutional investors association for real estate illustrates:

> "At a certain moment we were asked by a director of a housing corporation to join. He knew that we are a very active organization. I hesitated but said yes. And then I arrived in a chaotic setting with all sorts of enthusiasts. At first it gave me an awkward feeling. I wondered who was participating in what role. It seemed to be mainly people that put themselves forward. Sometimes voluntary and sometimes paid for. This is not how we are used to work. It was a mix of discussions, working groups and cross connections. And in the midst of this multiplicity I thought: we are going to do our own thing and we made a 'reversed bid book' to show what institutional investors do and want" [Respondent 2]

Since it was an experimental approach some tables delivered the expected advice, some came with unexpected outcomes and some did not come to results at all. Yet, the respondents at large signaled to be satisfied with the results of the soft space approach. Compared to classical approaches this approach was less expensive and produced a greater variety in results. However only few respondents

oversaw the variety and upon reflection some suggested that the more fluid or indirect outcomes were most impactful. A participant of the housing corporation explained:

> "This process generated a lot of 'side-effects. Usually we don't have the time to explain the way our world and our systems work to each other, but in this collaborative format we had. The setting made it possible to talk about everything and we knew that it would not out on the streets the next day. This helped adjusting the traditional images of each other. It was probably not aimed for beforehand, but it created the relationships among the organizations we can now draw upon in subsequent engagements. I find participating in these processes much more effective than attending conferences. I experienced it as a gift and learned a lot" [Respondent 18]

The experienced value of in-betweening

The aim of all three presented spaces was to try and create a breakthrough in the complex regional problem of the stagnation of building new dwellings in inner-city areas. Yet, most participants were unaware of the multiple spaces active around the same problem:

> "It was only after quite some sessions that I understood there is MIRT [second space]. I had the impression that it was mainly a search for money, but I had no idea what was going on there" [Respondent 2]

During the interviews and focus group the respondents expressed a strong need for an overview of spaces, their interrelationships and their link to the problem. The few respondents that did oversee and exploit the interactions between the different spaces experienced a deeper and more sustainable impact:

> "To prevent fragmentation we [first space] have to be part of MIRT [second space] and we have a strong relationship with the City Deals [third space]. We use each other's products. That gives my effort an added value and functions as a multiplier of my work. I have no doubt that my dedication was worth it" [Respondent 17]

One of the initiators of the ministry of Internal Affairs also described that the first space made the start of the third space easier:

> "The signing [of the deal in the third space] was in my last working week at the end of march in 2016. With the help of the 'Watertorenberaad' as an intermediary organization we called everyone with the question whether they would sign. They could sign up with commitment or as a sympathizer. They all chose for the first. That was the result of the initial collaboration [of the first space]" [Respondent 10]

And one of the chairpersons used the relation between the first and second space:

> "The connection with MIRT [second space] made it a lot easier for me to informally contact administrators and civil servants from the national level" [Respondent 1]

Several participants of the first soft space actively searched for legitimization in hard spaces by involving representatives of harder spaces at milestone moments or by referring to formal documents:

> "Sometimes I use a line from the coalition agreement, not because of that line, but because I need a connection to legitimate our efforts and investments" [Respondent 20]

Some were surprised by the impact the connection with hard spaces had:

> "It is actually a gigantic success that the Provincial Council decided to largely adopt our guideline for transit oriented development as a starting point for all conversations with the municipalities about inner city plans. And next to this the examples that we collected lead to an accepted motion in the council of the municipality of The Hague to evaluate their parking policy and start a pilot to build in higher density with less parking places" [Respondent 8]

And a participant from the housing corporation described the relevance of job rotation between the facilitator of the province of South Holland and a colleague from the housing corporation to better understand the institutional context. She also observed the softening of the province as a hard space stimulated by their role in the first soft space:

> "Before I participated I had strong doubts about the province as a valuable administrative body. That image totally changed. They performed a beautiful role in-between the municipalities almost without using power or politics. I think they can profile themselves much more as an intermediary organization. This role was harder to play when the two bigger cities of Rotterdam and The Hague were involved, but next elections I am going to emphatically vote" [Respondent 18]

And finally the respondents experienced that being transparent on their own interests and role helped in making realistic connections between spaces:

> "My face is associated with the national government. As if I can represent all these interests and worlds. Now, I am much more precise in what people can expect from me and it works" [Respondent 22]

In these positive experiences we can unravel some productive practices of in-betweening (see figure 3 for a visualization) like stimulating informal and verbal contact, stimulating spontaneous encounters at meetings concerning the regional problem at hand, involving representatives of hard spaces at milestone moments in soft spaces, adjusting historic images of the different organizations by taking time to really get to know each other's world and systems (for example through job rotation), being explicit about the own role, using intermediary organizations like the province and the Watertorenberaad to connect different spaces, using the products and outcomes of the one space as a starting point for the other and embedding ideas trough guidelines that can be politically adopted in hard spaces. These practices of in-betweening could be perceived as 'micro practices' responsible for 'macro breaks'.

The experienced struggle of in-betweening

However, the respondents also expressed frustrations about the lack of interaction between the multiple harder and softer spaces. There was no explicit strategy for connecting the different spaces. As a chairperson noted:

> "In my opinion we were finally doing something really valuable, but from June 2015 everything was focused on the City Deals [third space] instead of our tables and experiments [first space]. I didn't get feedback from the administrative gathering of MIRT [second space] and we were not involved in the selection of the cases for the City Deal [third space]. The different parts seemed to work at cross purposes." [Respondent 13]

Her righthand man explained why they were struggling themselves as well to make connections with the traditional hard spaces:

> "The products that we delivered at our table [first space] had to be useful for the city councils [hard space], but we found it hard to act strategic, to use the appropriate language and to legitimate our results" [Respondent 8]

A participant from the ministry of Infrastructure and Environment was disappointed about the way the results of the first space were presented in the second space and therefore had less impact on the administrative level:

> "In my opinion we didn't fully exploit the label of MIRT [second space]. We didn't succeed in having a true conversation on urban densification. It was presented under the heading of 'international competitiveness', but it drowned under that heading" [Respondent 22]

The initiator from the Ministry of Internal Affairs complained:

> "Everyone is responsible for its own delegation, but the fact that the departments of spatial planning and mobility were involved in MIRT [second space] and the departments of housing in our process [first space] didn't help" [Respondent 20]

One of the chairpersons was dissatisfied by the level of integration:

> "Because of the separations between the spaces and the fact that we didn't develop an integral perspective on urban regeneration. There were no moments of integration. You have to have the guts to let the chairpersons [of the first space] sit down at the table of MIRT [second

> space] to present the red lines. I would have taken responsibility for that. Now there was very few interaction. We certainly would have lost energy if we had to comply with the structure and formats of MIRT, but there are other ways to connect" [Respondent 1]

During most interviews the respondents expressed concerns about the embeddedness of the soft space approach, which turned out to be not self-evident:

> "I am worried about the follow-up and embeddedness of ideas [of the first space]. We tried to incorporate the innovative instruments in the city deal [third space], but they were not open to experiment. We had to start the discussion all over again" [Respondent 22]

In almost every interview it was stated that the success of the first soft space relied on the 'people' and the continuity of their involvement. They also noted that the different spaces needed different personal styles and repertoires as the initiator from the province put it:

> "The MIRT process [second space] and the process around the initiatives [first space] are completely different settings and thus we needed different people. The way of working has to suit your personal style. I have really thought this through when I asked possible participants to join" [Respondent 21]

During the conversation in the focus group, the participants concluded that not every style and repertoire was valued and exploited in every space and that stimulating a mixture of styles and repertoires would have helped in better connecting the spaces. For example, styles attracted and activated in the second space could have helped to increase the administrative relevance of the first space. Styles attracted and activated in the first space could have helped to shake up the routines and playing rules in the second space. A participant from the private sector said:

> "I wouldn't be afraid of the presence of the people from MIRT [second space]. Of course, it are fixed-role persons. It would easily feel like you draw outside the box, but that is the point of mixing these styles." [Respondent 17]

Some practitioners explicitly functioned as in-betweeners and were seen as crucial to the success of the soft space:

> "A private and social participant said to me: 'you have to be in between, then we feel safer. It helps when someone can be a neutral mediator and moderator. Someone that builds bridges, guides the conversation and formulates issues'. No one wanted to be in this position, but I learned a lot and increased my network, gained more understanding and got a stronger profile" [Respondent 7]

The in-between position was not easy to fulfill and the respondents raised the need for more specific individuals explicitly fulfilling that position:

> "The facilitator of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was a strong connector. He has an enormous network and is an innovator, but even he had to drag and push to make things happen. The national governmental role was in my opinion too much depending on him alone. I think we should have made that line stronger and organize backing for him" [Respondent 22]

As a consequence of the struggles of in-betweening, the soft space approach of the first space that was largely considered a success from within the space itself, was less recognized across the spaces and therefore less embedded. However, in these frustrations and regrets possible practices of in-betweening can be derived. For example: Developing an integral perspective on the regional problem with input from all spaces, stimulating overlap in participants and key agents across spaces, naming explicit in-betweeners that take care of the connection between spaces, combining participants with different styles and repertoires in one space that have affinity with repertoires in other spaces, investing in a common language to discuss in-between topics, communicating about the successes of the different spaces, knowing and using the right headings that are important in another space and involving participants from other spaces in decision-making.

The conditions for in-betweening

Why did they not perform these practices? The respondents explained that the co-existence of the multiple harder and softer spaces made regional planning more difficult. It resulted in role diffusion and uncertainty about the own position and approach. The respondents felt discomfort, unease or awkwardness when switching between spaces. Although they were mostly unaware of the underlying fields of tension that caused this feeling, in reflective conversations several tensions were defined. For initiators and directors the most pressing tension was 'protecting a space to be able to be innovative' versus 'connecting it to other spaces to be able to spread innovation'. The fields of tension experienced in the differences of approach between the spaces were for example 'monitoring results according to agreements (central in the second space)' versus 'creating energy for a movement and unforeseen results (central in the first space)'. Or 'stimulating big gestures and decisions to solve this urgent problem (second space)' versus 'taking small steps as part of a new approach to unravel the complexity (first space)'. A tension experienced in the different roles performed in spaces was 'fulfilling a directing role in the hard(er) space of the province and MIRT' versus 'fulfilling a facilitating role in a soft space. Fields of tension experienced in the timing between spaces were 'following the pace and planning of the own space' versus 'adjusting the pace and planning to important moments in other spaces'. Or 'stopping a soft space that is followed up by another space' versus 'letting a soft space run parallel to another space to keep on stimulating innovation'.

There were many more fields of tension tangible in the fabric between spaces and the respondents had their own ways in dealing with them. The regional initiator choose to protect the first space against the hardness of the second space:

> "I didn't want to bother an energetic arrangement with the rules and regulations of the other" [Respondent 21]

The director of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment involved in the second space choose to not become involved in the first, but felt the downsides:

> "If I would have intervened [in the first space], then I would have done it in a traditional way, but the consequence of not intervening is that I now have no control on the next steps" [Respondent 19]

The initiator of the Ministry of Internal Affairs made futile efforts to connect the first space to the second space:

> "I really had to push to bring this beautiful example [first space] to the attention of the administrative table [of the second space], but it didn't last" [Respondent 10]

Judgements about both sides of the tension and corresponding spaces made it harder to equally value both sides and stimulate a 'both/and'-approach. Most participants assessed the second space by its characteristics as a hard(er) space and also criticized it like that:

> "MIRT truly is horrible. Sometimes there are even thirty civil servants around one table to prepare the administrative gathering. All the speeches are ratified beforehand. My minister experienced it as a puppet-show" [Respondent 20]
>
> "MIRT to me is comprehensive and complicated. They work with complex instruments and cost-benefit-analyses, but hardly raise 'why-questions' to talk about the heart of the problem" [Respondent 15]

Participants also illustrated that the way of working in this second harder space, being the most historical and dominant space, made people fall back in their traditional reflexes and choose the one side of a tension over the other. The director of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment explained the difficulty to soften this space and stimulate spillover effects:

> "I wanted to break through the culture of routine and formality in MIRT [second space]. But it sometimes felt useless to try. Our measure stick is still too much focused on the professional preparation of meetings, which is constraining personal involvement. All our ambitions to work differently are prohibited by the fact that we have money and then our traditional

accounting lines become dominant again, what makes it harder to be an equal partner in collaborations" [Respondent 19]

In the above some less productive in-betweening practices can be recognized when neglecting the tensions or explicitly choosing one side or space over the other: focusing on the rationale of one's existence instead of the rationale of the regional problem, postponing involvement until things get more concrete for decision-making, defending the value of a soft space by explaining instead of experiencing, bypassing hard(er) spaces, applying the playing rules of the one space to the other, opposing to another space, not following up on earlier connections or even continuously separating the different spaces out of fear for slowing down innovation or decision-making. Making practices of in-betweening productive made a strong appeal to the competences of the respondents. The initiator from the Ministry of Internal Affairs deliberated:

"I wondered what could I have done differently? The label of MIRT and the renewal of MIRT was not recognized in my own organization. It was 'not invented here'" [Respondent 10]

Having difficult conversations to address tensions was part of these competences that some tried to avoid and some found challenging:

"I feel challenged to guide tense conversations and find it fun to do. You have to feel the tension in order to be able to move" [Respondent 15]

One participant explicitly tried to increase the tension to break through stalemates and experienced resistance:

"On the basis of accessibility we explored new locations for housing. Until then no one dared to discuss sacred cows. The province got pretty nervous about this and people reacted with 'What were you thinking to name specific locations and numbers?' It was difficult to talk about, but conflict can help to innovate" [Respondent 5]

The secretary of the first space explained that dealing with tensions required opposing competences:

"You have to be able to deal with chaos and structure, you have to be able to move along and to set directions and to wait and speed up the pace" [Respondent 23]

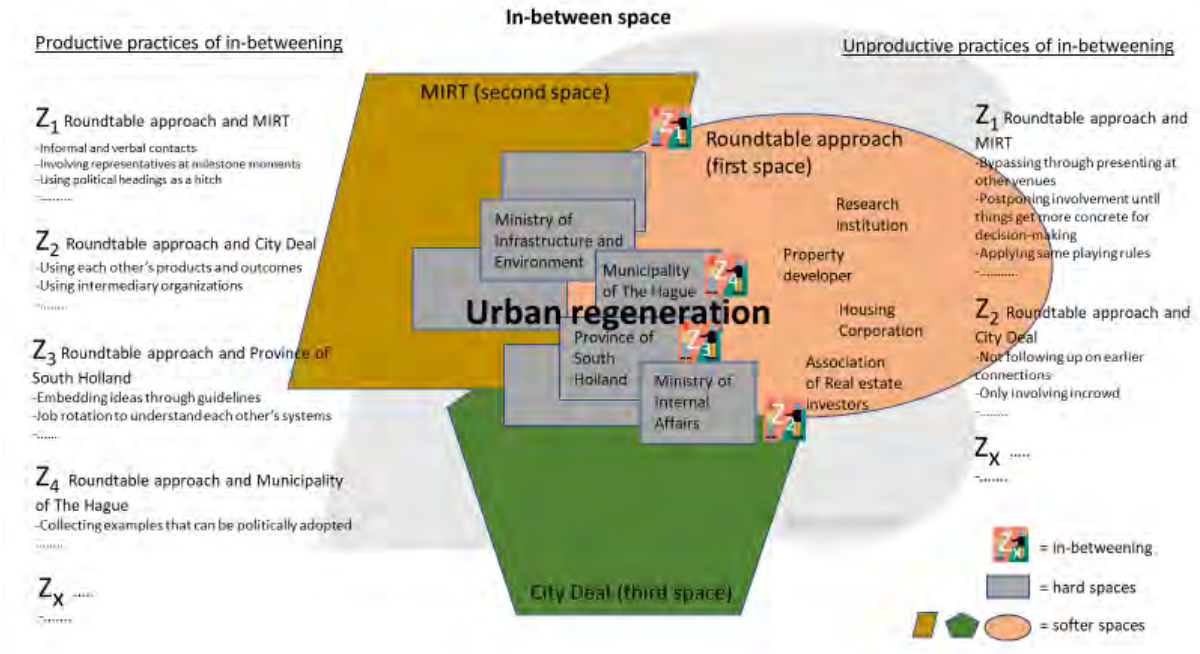

Figure 3. Practices of in-betweening for the case of urban regeneration (source: authors' own illustration).

Considering the above, four conditions for in-betweening can be distinguished. Firstly, participants have to have an overview of the different spaces related to the regional problem at hand and have to

consider these multiple spaces as part of one reality. If participants are not aware of the interconnections they cannot build bridges. Secondly, the different spaces have to be understood and appreciated for their positive strengths as equally valuable and complementing approaches. If participants do not value a space they are not motivated to connect with that space. Thirdly, also the different personal styles that are performed in different spaces have to be considered as equally valuable. If participants are not valuing different styles they will not be able to use each other's strengths and talents. And fourthly, as a consequence, participants have to be able to deal with differences and inherent tensions. If they are not able to, they will easily fall back on unproductive in-betweening practices limiting the impact of soft spaces.

5. Conclusion and further research

We used the concept of soft and hard space to study the collaboration across organizations in dealing with complex regional problems. We argued that soft and hard spaces are not opposed to each other in separate realities. We observed an accumulation and variation of harder and softer spaces around the same regional problem. The case of urban regeneration showed that hardness or softness was not so much defined by the geographical boundaries (administrative or functional) and statutory responsibilities, but mainly by the (in)formality of the collaborative approach. It also illustrated that new, informal approaches and facilitating roles by the public sector do not replace more familiar directing roles and formal approaches: softer and harder spaces consequently and simultaneously co-exist. Explanations for the contemporary limited impact of soft spaces were found in the dynamics between the multiple and divergent spaces. We showed there is merit in focusing on the specific characteristics of the in-betweenness and that more attention is needed for the 'institutional work' in-between harder and softer spaces. We illuminated many 'micro practices' of in-betweening that practitioners draw upon. Considering these micro practices helps to better understand the effects of the whole of spaces. We could bring these fine-grained practices out because of our in-vivo involvement and tacit knowledge. Considering the work in-between, the micro practices may lead to macro breaks in impact. However, the tensions between the different spaces complicate the work in-between and can also lead to unproductive practices. The tensions that arise from the in-between dynamics are hard to manage, but at the same time offer potential for change and innovation.

Further research is necessary to investigate how to act upon these in-between dynamics. General and familiar intervention tools and methods are often not useful, because they are not set up for the specific context and practitioner using them. Hajer and Laws (2006) use the term ordering device to explain how practitioners structure their reality to get a grip on their daily work and deal with the dynamics. They write that the analytic task for studying practices, is to develop concepts that can mediate between actors and structure. Orderings can help doing this. Also, Halffman (2003) explains that ordering stimulates interaction and according to Moor (2012) we need to disintegrate to be able to survive in complex in-between settings. This resonates with a performance perspective that focusses on the 'work' that is being done to create order and stability in inherently unstable situations (Hajer & Pelzer 2018; Hajer, 2009). We suggest that further research is needed to find orderings in the multiplicity of harder and softer spaces, orderings in the different styles and repertoires for in-betweeners and orderings in practices of in-betweening that allow dealing with inherent tensions between spaces and styles. We suggest to involve reflective practitioners to stimulate a deeper understanding of the work in-between on the one hand and to help practitioners reflect on their work in-between on the other hand.

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