



## Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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# Rural-Urban Governance Arrangements and Planning Instruments National Environment and Planning Act (NEPA)

Ede, Netherlands

## 1. Overview

The Dutch Environment and Planning Act (NEPA) aims to enhance the place-based integration of existing spatial planning, environmental and nature oriented regulatory frameworks. As such it replaces 26 national regulatory frameworks originating from various policy domains. NEPA intends to enhance the prospects of participatory and integrative rural spatial planning.

The framework redistributes policy responsibilities between national, provincial and municipal administrations to the benefit of the local administrations, although with certain checks and balances by higher administrative levels. As part of forthcoming NEPA implementation, Ede, in close cooperation with other Food Valley municipalities, have already started to experiment with a “Menu-Card Approach”.

This policy experiment is based on the concept of putting conditions on regional agricultural expansion opportunities, particularly in settings where municipal and provincial spatial plans do not completely match and leave room for different interpretations. Ede municipality invites farmers with development plans in these areas to join a dialogue and negotiation process about farm adaptations that surpass minimum regulatory requirements for environmental, landscape and/or nature performance and spatial quality. In other words, it gives the municipality a more prominent role to integrate regulatory environments.

NEPA simultaneously builds upon and extends previous policy experiences with “Red for Green” and “Red-for-Red” constructions. These instruments introduced specific offset mechanisms with the overall objective to mitigate and counterbalance regional agri-environmental problems. Different from these instruments, however, NEPA explicitly aspires to safeguard rural business prospects with tailor-made solutions to specific local spatial quality and/or eco-system service concerns.



## 2. Main Challenges

NEPA intends to address and overcome the limitations of ‘high density’ regulatory frameworks. More specifically it wants to alleviate shortcomings like insufficient stakeholder participation and involvement in policy making, insensitivity for local specificity in policy making, obscure policy making due to contradictory regulations, the inability of policy making to better align with a growing diversity in rural business strategies, and – ultimately - overall institutional incapacity to integrate multiple policy objectives.

## 3. Main Insights

### 3.1. Insights related to the broad area of “network governance”

As argued, NEPA’s main ambition is to devolve responsibilities within hierarchical policy frameworks and to adopt a more integrative and participatory spatial planning process and framework. As a novel governance arrangement, it aims to strengthen regional rural-urban relations. Its success depends largely on how the municipality puts the framework into practice. By following, unravelling and participating in ongoing implementation processes in Ede (and perhaps other municipalities), it becomes possible to gain insight as to how NEPA will be successful and – if not - identify its major barriers. Particularly attention will be paid to municipal experimenting with the “Menu-Card Approach”. This novel municipal spatial policy instrument aims to challenge rural entrepreneurs to go beyond legally-required environmental and spatial quality performances in their negotiation with municipal authorities on business development plans.

### 3.2. Insights related to mechanisms of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation

As a novel spatial planning procedure, NEPA assumes different forms of cross-sectoral cooperation. Firstly, by better integrating municipal spatial planning and national environmental policy making. Secondly, by stimulating public-private dialog about

integrative policy making. Further study is needed to determine if it will also result in other manifestations of cross-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between rural economic sectors).

### 3.3. Insights related to the role of (actual, potential) social, organizational, institutional innovations

NEPA hinges on social, organizational and institutional innovation at various levels. As a novel multi-level governance experiment, its (further) implementation will provide insights about the need and complexity to connect institutional innovations from different backgrounds; not only from national and regional institutions, but also at the European scale through its current and potential linkages with CAP pillar 1 reforms. NEPA further allows the interrelations with social and organisational innovation as expressed by regional emergence of territorial cooperatives (see also Ede's rural business model snapshot). This closely associated combination of social, organisational and institutional innovation makes NEPA a particularly interesting rural-urban synergy governance topic.

## 4. Effectiveness Indicators

As it is in its initial experimental phase, it is too premature to start talking about NEPA effectiveness indicators. So far it concerns above all a rather interesting novel spatial planning tool that might have important repercussions for the future of Dutch spatial planning. Some impression of NEPA's effectiveness may be derived from the progress in ongoing experiments with the "Menu-Card Approach" in Ede and the Food Valley. In addition, ongoing national and regional process-based NEPA monitoring and evaluation efforts will provide insights in its effectiveness (see also section 5).

## 5. Illustration and further information

Following sources provide additional info on NEPA objectives and ongoing policy experiences, experimenting and process facilitation:

[www.omgevingswetportaal.nl](http://www.omgevingswetportaal.nl)

[www.aandeslagmetdeomgevingswet.nl](http://www.aandeslagmetdeomgevingswet.nl)

[www.groenecirkels.nl](http://www.groenecirkels.nl)

Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu (2016) *7x bestuurders aan zet, de omgevingswet vraagt actie! [7 leverages for policymakers, National Environment and Planning Act demands for action!]*

Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu (2018) *De opgaven voor de Nationale Omgevingswet [The mission for National Environment and Planning Act]*

Programma aan de slag met de omgevingswet (2018) *Eindrapport pilots omgevingsvisie 2017-2018 [Final Report Pilots Environmental Envisioning]*

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