

The additional value of multi-level governance in retail planning

The influence of regional and provincial coordination on the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities



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Preface

Here I proudly present my Master's thesis, which is the final result of my research process. This research was conducted in order to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Master's program of 'Spatial Planning' in the specialisation of 'Planning, Land and Real Estate Development' at Radboud University Nijmegen. It is the result of much dedication, perseverance and hard work, as I conducted the research independently. The length of the content is longer than the norm for a Master's thesis, because much information was considered to be too important to be left out. Personally I have learned a lot from the research process, especially in better focusing my theoretical framework, improving my interview techniques, and using new ways to compare research results to the established theoretical framework. Furthermore, I believe that the choices in the research design provide for additional space and context to make more relevant practical recommendations, which may be more focused on the practical situation. This mainly concerns the choice to place the selected cases in the framework of different governance layers, and interpret them within that context.

First of all, I want to thank my thesis supervisor Ary Samsura from the Radboud University Nijmegen. He provided me with excellent support during the research process and I am grateful for his constructive feedback, his guidance, and for our conversations. I believe that this has improved both the quality of the Master's thesis itself, as well as the quality of the research process. It also helped me to stay focused on the main research goals, and not to walk side paths. Furthermore, I would also like to thank Harvey Jacobs for providing his perspective on the problem of vacant retail properties in the city centres of large cities.

In particular I want to thank my parents, Frans Reinders and Diny van Aanholt, and my sister, Isabelle Reinders, for their strong and unwavering support. Their encouragement, involvement, motivation, and feedback always helped me very much during every phase of the process, and it was of very much additional value. It has contributed to making this Master's thesis much better. Furthermore, I want to thank all friends that provided support or feedback.

Finally, I want to thank all the respondents that I interviewed for my research. They have invested their time and effort into answering my many questions. I am very grateful for their willingness to participate, and for their contribution to improving my research. The conversations have clarified many different topics, and thereby enriched the results. I learned a lot from them about coordination in spatial planning (and retail planning) between different governance levels.

During the courses of the Master's program I became increasingly interested in decentralisation processes in the field of spatial planning. I hope this Master's thesis achieves its goal of inspiring that same interest in you, the reader. I also hope that this Master's thesis can be a valuable contribution to the development of knowledge about multi-level governance, and its influence on the effectiveness of municipal retail planning.

Maxim Reinders
Vlijmen, February 10th, 2021

Summary

For a long time, the national government of the Netherlands had an active role in retail planning, and actively aimed to protect and preserve existing 'retail structures', especially in city centres. However, in 2004 this changed when the Nota Ruimte was implemented. Many national guidelines and restrictions were abolished, and retail planning was essentially decentralised. The Dutch provinces were invited to develop their own retail planning policies to fill this 'void'. However, the decentralisation had side effects, and resulted in large differences between individual provinces in the extent to which they developed new retail policies, or took over (former) national retail policies. Subsequently, this led to just as many large differences between regional authorities (regions and sub-regions) in their legal structures, powers and decision-making processes. There are indications that the uncertainty on such rules (and the lack of such rules) for regional authorities might hold back effective collaborative planning in the policy field of retail planning.

This assumption seems to be supported by practice. Since at least 2013, different ministries have been involved in initiating and managing initiatives to advance the new roles and responsibilities of provinces and regional authorities in retail planning; most notable among them were the Retailagenda in 2015, and the associated provincial RetailDeals in 2016. Simultaneously, there was also pressure from sectoral expertise organisations to improve aforementioned regional governance structures in retail planning. Very recently, in a progress report from 2019, a follow-up project for the Retailagenda was still considered to be necessary, and one of its main themes was regional coordination. This follow-up project was followed by many different policy tools, which were developed for municipalities to support and further advance their regional coordination processes (among other things). Societal developments also seem to indicate that there is room for improvement. A number of structural problems in the retail sector of the Netherlands seem to persist, while simultaneously new problems arise. The most influential new problem is a rise in the amount of vacant retail properties, which affects city centres disproportionately. This may have a negative impact on revitalisation strategies, liveability and community life.

For these reasons, the effectiveness of collaborative planning is researched for the field of retail planning in the Netherlands, but with a different research approach than the 'collaborative planning' approach. This is because in the past it was still unclear if the new retail planning system of the Netherlands might be characterised as 'collaborative planning', given its practical difficulties in regional and provincial governance. In this research the 'multi-level governance' approach is used, which might provide new perspectives and insights on matters related specifically to decentralisation, coordination and negotiation, networking between governmental levels, decision-making rules (and roles), and self-changing (adaptive) capacities of the planning system. The 'multi-level governance' approach has already been used to analyse governance systems in other sub-fields of spatial planning. For aforementioned purpose, to analyse the new governance system for retail planning in the Netherlands, the following research question has been used:

In what ways might multi-level governance influence the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities in the Netherlands?

For achieving a higher level of depth, both of the theoretical concepts, namely multi-level governance and the effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning in the Netherlands, were explored extensively, and were translated into measurable indicators. To measure multi-level governance, a division has been made into the dimensions of: (1) the decentralisation of retail planning competencies; (2) the quality of (power) relationships between governmental actors. The third dimension concerns additional, related factors in municipal decision-making could have an impact, and that were also analysed. For measuring the effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning, the quality of municipalities' local retail plans (retail visions) was analysed.

The conducted research is a qualitative exploratory casestudy which compares two groups of cases, and is thereby based on a constructivist research paradigm. These two groups of cases were selected based on a presumed difference in multi-level governance, which was based on a number of different factors. Each group of cases consists of three municipalities. In order to study the cases and their governance systems in their natural environment, and for achieving a 'holistic account' of the situation for the selected cases, the regional authorities' and province's involvement in retail planning were also analysed for each group. For each group, the involved regional authorities were different. However, all cases were located within the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. The dimensions associated with multi-level governance were analysed through conducting semi-structured respondent interviews with representatives from the involved governmental actors. For municipalities, respondents from the department of spatial planning were preferred, while there was also a preference for respondents that had knowledge on the coordination processes with other governmental actors (municipalities, regional authorities, and the province) in the field of retail planning. Ultimately there were 14 respondents, divided over 11 interviews. The effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning was analysed through a qualitative content analysis of municipalities' retail policies (retail visions).

The conclusions and results demonstrate that there are differences in multi-level governance between the two groups of cases. These differences seem to influence several aspects of municipal retail planning. The differences in multi-level governance seem to be most prevalent at the level of regional authorities. For the province's involvement there are less differences in multi-level governance, despite a provincial project to stimulate and support local retail planning at municipalities. It seems to be the case that a higher level of multi-level governance in governance systems for retail planning has mostly contributed to positive effects for municipalities' retail policies (retail visions), such as including future perspectives and scenarios, including 'legal' implementation instruments (or tools), including clear narrative storylines and role distributions aimed to motivate stakeholders, including thematic elaborations of policy goals, and including explicit expressions on the need for frameworks and directional steering. The other way around, it seems that a (relative) absence of multi-level governance can contribute to municipalities' retail policies (retail visions) having a different focus, namely a focus on increasing the scope of the included current trends, including additional data on current trends, including policy frameworks, and including elaborated overviews of responsibilities.

Differences in multi-level governance between the two groups were identified in different ways. For municipalities mutually, several matters were of importance for achieving a high level of multi-level governance. This concerns their motivations on coordination, their perception on the 'obligatory nature' of coordination, their willingness to negotiate, and their willingness to establish policies to prevent non-adherence of regional (retail) agreements. A special place was reserved for expanding the 'networking capacity' of spatial administrative meetings (Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg), and in improving values such as openness and transparency between municipalities. For regional authorities, there was a large overlap with the findings for municipalities. Additionally, regional authorities can increase their influence on municipalities' retail planning for improving coordination, they can decentralise decision-making on large-scale retail plans to the sub-regional level (if it concerns regions), or they can establish regional decisions and regional agreements to have a 'binding nature', and they can uphold adherence to such decisions and agreements by municipalities. Additionally, regional authorities can engage in new (proactive) networking roles, or coordination roles. All of these measures seem to positively influence the level of multi-level governance at the regional level. For regional authorities, retail plan assessment commissions seemed to play a special role. It seems that such commissions can indeed contribute to a higher level of multi-level governance if their decisions are made to be 'binding decisions', if they have (additional) proactive roles in retail planning (such as providing unsolicited advice to municipalities), or if they organise meetings to institutionalise the assessment process and advisory process. Such commissions can also have a role in increasing the 'networking capacity' and possibilities in regional administrative meetings, and can thereby improve the quality of such meetings, if they take over the more 'divisive tasks' from these meetings (such as assessing the submitted retail plans). For provinces, mostly the facilitating role seems to be important for achieving a high level of multi-level governance. It seems that provinces can mostly have an influence by supporting or enabling changes to regional authorities, and by bestowing upon these regional authorities certain (aforementioned) roles, responsibilities, and decision-making powers. Furthermore, the province also seems to have an important role in improving the 'networking capacity' of the spatial administrative meetings (Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg), but in a different way than municipalities. The province can expand the scope of such meetings beyond 'obligatory' assessment cases. It seems that the province can also have an impact by further advancing currently existing processes and perspectives, such as further decreasing (possible) perceptions on the hierarchical role that the province may have had in the past in retail planning, and by remaining pragmatic in their choice of an (institutional) coordination level for retail plans and retail policies.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Decentralisation of Dutch retail planning

The Dutch retail sector faced (and currently faces) several challenges. In order to address these challenges more effectively, the national government implemented the Nota Ruimte in 2004 (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). For the entire Netherlands, this regulation decentralised the responsibility for retail planning to the provinces, and thereby indirectly also to regions and municipalities (Krabben, 2009). During the last decades, and during most of recent Dutch history, the national government has had a quite active role in retail planning. Their ideology to preserve city centres and 'structures', and to protect them (economically) from external threats, has been a leading directive for sectoral planning for a long time. For decades, the national government was involved in maintaining a defined 'hierarchy of retail functions', mainly by restricting the development of retail types that could disrupt existing systems, such as shopping malls and 'new' types of large-scale retail at 'peripheral' locations (Evers, 2002; Spierings, 2006; Needham, 2016). The national government had several restrictions and guidelines in place for that purpose, which were strictly enforced, until suddenly it all changed because of the Nota Ruimte. Although the reasons for this change were partly of an ideological nature, it was also considered that decentralisation would make retail planning more effective (Krabben, 2009). Many retail sector organisations were not particularly happy that the national government abandoned its former system of guidelines and restrictions, even though the Dutch provinces were instructed to develop retail policies to fill the 'void' (Spierings, 2006; Evers, 2011). This decentralisation seems to quickly have led to a divergence at 'lower' administrative levels. Although all provinces established a 'minimum' of guidelines for different types of 'peripheral' retail, there are large differences in the amount of restrictions that they took over from the national government. Some provinces took over most of the restrictions, while other provinces further decentralised retail planning to municipalities. Some provinces seem to have found a middle ground in decentralisation (Krabben, 2009). In many places in the Netherlands regions were to be given a more important role in retail planning, as coordination was certainly required for preserving important retail areas. However, in the Netherlands regions are not a consistent 'official' layer of government: they are administrative collaborations between individual municipalities (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017). Several provinces considered the regional level to be the most appropriate level for coordinating retail policies and retail developments, and thus the decentralisation also led to a divergence among regions. Despite the special administrative nature and status of regional authorities, some regional retail planning systems have a 'legal' status, which is provided by the involved province in such cases. These regions often have specialised commissions for fulfilling their retail planning responsibilities. Such regions are often also significantly involved in the practice of retail planning themselves (at the administrative level), for example by being active in assessing or approving private sector initiatives, or in making regional impact studies mandatory for some types of retail plans (Krabben, 2009). In this way, regional policies and decisions can have a 'legal' status for some municipalities. However, there is also another side of the coin, especially in the regions of the Netherlands that did not receive such responsibilities in retail planning. Uncertainty on the 'rules', as well as the

absence of legal powers of regional authorities, both seem to hold back effective collaborative planning there, especially for their management of ‘peripheral’ retail locations (Krabben, 2009).

Obstacles and risks

However, aforementioned research by van der Krabben (2009) was conducted 11 years ago, and therefore one might ask if the Dutch retail sector currently still suffers from obstacles to collaborative planning, such as uncertain ‘rules’ by lacking provincial regulations, or by lacking ‘legal’ powers for regional authorities. From the current policy responses, progress reports, and sectoral responses, it seems to be considered that, until recently, there was still room for improvement in regional coordination between municipalities in the field of retail planning (Droogh Trommelen en Partners, 2013; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2015; Interprovinciaal Overleg, 2016; Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017; Keijzer, 2019; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). This indication seems to be supported by the ‘policy tools’ that have been developed for municipalities for such purposes (Retailagenda, 2019a; Retailagenda, 2019b; Rho Adviseurs et al., 2019; Stec Groep, 2019). This room for improvement in regional coordination also seems to be exemplified by the unchanged nature of some long-existing negative trends in the Dutch retail sector, some of them with a structural nature. This concerns the vacant retail property problem, the spatial differences in the distribution of the vacant retail property problem, and the size upscaling of stores; a trend that has been dominant for years (Evers et al., 2011; Buitelaar et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2015; Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019). There are also risks for the Dutch retail sector. After a period of decline, the amount of vacant retail properties is rising considerably again, and its uneven spatial distribution becomes visible at both the provincial and municipal levels (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019; Slob, 2020). Another possible risk might be ‘locational sorting’ of the Dutch retail structure. This means that the pressure (and increased competition) from large-scale retail at ‘peripheral’ locations has caused a spatial sorting of different types of retail, over different types of retail areas (Evers et al., 2011). This might have increased city centre uniformity (Krabben, 2013). With regards to competition alone, the oversupply of ‘peripheral’ retail locations might be a risk (Evers et al., 2011).

Research problem

“Just as we see differences in sectors, we also see large differences in shopping areas. The centres of the big cities attract many visitors and shoppers. Many medium-sized cities and medium-sized shopping centres are losing their central function and will partly have to transform into other functions in order to remain economically healthy and attractive for residents and visitors. Seven out of ten shopping areas are experiencing a decrease in visitors.” (Keijzer, 2019, p. 3).

Problems in a country’s retail sector can cause societal problems. Vacant retail properties can act as a barrier to the revitalisation of large, centrally located cities. Next to that, they can affect many different aspects of community life negatively. The availability of retail services may have an impact on communities’ consumer-wellbeing, family-wellbeing, and their cultural life, which may indirectly impact their overall quality of life (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Sirgy et al., 2008). Strengthening the liveability of city centres is also an important goal of prominent retail policies

that have been introduced in the Netherlands, such as the Retailagenda (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2015). Concerns about the potential impact of deteriorating retail areas on the liveability levels of regions have often been important considerations for reinvestigating the role of retail policies for regions (Droogh Trommelen en Partners, 2013).

Aforementioned policy responses, persisting negative trends, new emerging problems, and the considered importance of the retail sector for the liveability of city centres, together seem to make it clear that it is useful to further investigate the new retail planning governance structure and all its components. At the moment, some retail policies have been introduced in the Netherlands, which all sought to improve the Dutch retail planning system (and the positions and roles of provinces and regional authorities in it). These were most notably the Retailagenda in 2015, the associated provincial RetailDeals in 2016, and the Retailagenda's follow-up program in 2019 (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2015; Interprovinciaal Overleg, 2016; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). Given the fact that the decentralisation of policy competencies and the quality of relationships between actors are important dimensions in the current Dutch retail planning system, it would be reasonable to analyse the effectiveness of the system by using the 'multi-level governance' approach, which is still absent at the moment. According to the literature, analysing these dimensions would indeed seem to be relevant for a 'multi-level governance' approach (Prud'homme, 1995; Smith, 1997; Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

1.2 Research goal

Based on the problem statement, the goal of this research can be explained as follows.

The main goal of this research is to explore the influences of (different aspects of) multi-level governance on the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities in the Netherlands.

1.3 Research question

In order to achieve the research goal, the following research question is proposed.

In what ways might multi-level governance influence the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities in the Netherlands?

For answering this research question, the following sub-questions have been formulated. For these sub-questions, it should be considered that this research is a comparative casestudy, in which two groups of cases are compared. These two groups of cases are selected based on a presumed difference in multi-level governance between the two groups of cases. This is further detailed in chapter '3.2.2 Data collection', which explains the case selection. All sub-questions apply to these two groups of cases. In their naming conventions, the groups of cases are often referred to as the 'first group' and the 'second group'.

1. *In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their decentralisation of retail planning competencies, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?*
2. *In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their quality of power relationships between (governmental) actors, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?*
3. *In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their municipal decision-making, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences, that influence the quality and implementation of local plans?*
4. *In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their quality and implementation of local plans, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?*

1.4 Research relevance

1.4.1 Scientific relevance

This research focuses on the influence of (factors associated with) multi-level governance on the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities, and by that aims to contribute to the existing debates over the influence of ‘new’ governance roles for different governmental actors (such as provinces and regions). This research is theoretically relevant because this influence of multi-level governance on municipalities’ retail planning has not been studied much in the Netherlands yet. However, the influences of multi-level governance in other cases of spatial planning (and in related practices or fields) have been studied in the Netherlands (see e.g. Ploegmakers et al. (2013), Ploegmakers and Beckers (2015), Verduijn et al. (2015), and Veeneman and Mulley (2018)) (Ploegmakers et al., 2013; Ploegmakers & Beckers, 2015; Verduijn et al., 2015; Veeneman & Mulley, 2018).

Additionally, from a spatial planning perspective it also seems that there are still research gaps in the change of the retail planning system of the Netherlands. The first research gap seems to concern measuring the effectiveness of new governance structures in retail planning. In 2009, van der Krabben (2009) researched the changes that had happened to the Dutch retail planning policy because of the national government’s decentralisation by the Nota Ruimte in 2004, using Healey’s (1998) ‘collaborative planning’ approach (Healey, 1998). It is concluded that the uncertainties for ‘peripheral’ retail planning might hold back effective collaborative planning for provinces and regions. After more than a decade, it remains unclear to what extent the new retail planning system has enabled collaborative planning. Given the uncertainties in the implementation of the new system, it might be relevant to use the ‘multi-level governance’ approach as well, since this approach might fit into Healey’s (2006) conceptualisation of a ‘new’ urban governance type (Healey, 2006). The use of a ‘multi-level governance’ approach might therefore also provide new insights to the discussion of Dutch retail planning policy. The approach focuses on inter-level coordination, negotiation, networking, decision-making, and role distributions (Marks, 1996; Peters & Pierre, 2001; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008; Piattoni, 2009).

By placing the ‘new’ governance structure in a ‘multi-level governance’ framework and analysing its possible influence on the retail planning of municipalities, this research might contribute to generating new knowledge on the effectiveness of retail planning under the new planning regime. And improving regional policy coordination in retail planning still seems to be important in the government’s perspective (Keijzer, 2019; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019).

1.4.2 Societal relevance

This research could provide a contribution to exploring in which ways ‘new’ types of governance might have an influence on the retail planning of municipalities. As mentioned earlier, this is relevant because there are structural problems in the Dutch retail sector. The amount of vacant retail properties is rising quickly again, and a large majority of those vacant retail properties are vacant for several years; a third of them is even vacant structurally (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019; Slob, 2020). This research and its results might contribute to providing more clarity on how to address such problems in the retail sector, and also on how to address the societal problems that arise from these sectoral problems. It might also contribute to providing more understanding for decision-makers on the ‘new’ type of governance and its functioning.

Next to that, this research is relevant because improving the ‘new’ decentralised governance in retail planning (which replaced the former national governance in the retail sector), seems to be one of the Dutch government’s most important goals for the retail sector. This might be indicated by the sectoral policy responses in the form of the Retailagenda (in 2015), provincial RetailDeals (in 2016), and the Retailagenda’s follow-up program (in 2019) (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2015; Interprovinciaal Overleg, 2016; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). Next to that, it seems to be the case that regional coordination is still considered a theme that requires in-depth study (Keijzer, 2019). From the responses from sectoral interest groups it also seems to be the case that contributing to the knowledge development on the ‘new’ governance system (and its provincial and regional components) might indeed be considered of additional value for the Dutch retail sector (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017).

2. Theory

This chapter covers the theoretical framework, operationalisation, and conceptual model. The theories on the concepts that were introduced in the previous chapter, as well as their theoretical definitions, are mostly elaborated in the theoretical framework. Further on in the operationalisation, these theories and theoretical definitions are translated into practically measurable indicators with the use of different theories. These are fit within well-defined dimensions. The theoretical framework and the operationalisation both inform the conceptual model, which links all used theories and concepts together, and establishes presumed relationships between them.

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 Spatial planning and the retail sector in the Netherlands

History of retail planning in the Netherlands

The core ideology of the retail planning of the Netherlands has largely been the same throughout history. It is aimed at preserving existing retail structures, combined with the adaptation of specific parts of the retail structures to changing circumstances, both economically and spatially (Krabben, 2009). From the Second World War until recently, retail planning was largely the responsibility of the national government. Historically the national government has had a relatively large influence the characteristics of the retail planning system. Spierings (2006) mentions that this ideology of preservation was indeed used for a long time to preserve and protect city centres (economically) from external threats, mainly by restricting retail development at other locations (Spierings, 2006). Especially 'peripheral' large-scale retail locations are subject to these limitations, although there are also attempts to integrate such locations into the system. The Dutch retail planning system consists of a planned hierarchy of shopping centres, which is based on consumer service levels. Thereby city and village centres remain at the top of the hierarchy. It is mentioned that the planned hierarchy of functions in the Dutch retail planning system was originally based on the principles of Christaller's central place theory, with the purpose of improving sectoral efficiency. In the past, this theory has often been used as a normative planning tool to designate specific locations for specific types of retail (Guy, 1998; Atzema et al., 2012). The original central place theory is largely based on the accessibility of services, and it assumes a threshold value and spatial range for each service, which together determine its market value and its place in the hierarchy. In practice, this often means that more specialised services are located at more accessible, central places, such as cities. For clarifying existing situations, the central place theory has certain flaws in its economic and spatial assumptions, and nowadays its explanatory value seems to be relatively low. But in the past it has been used as a practical spatial planning tool, and thus it partly explains the currently existing spatial hierarchy in the Dutch retail sector. In this hierarchy, retail areas in city centres have the highest place. These are followed by district-level shopping centres, and ultimately follow neighbourhood shopping centres and shopping centres in smaller villages. Overall, the shopping centres with a higher place in the hierarchy have more specialised retail functions (Spierings, 2006).

The limitations that were established for different types of large-scale retail at 'peripheral' locations have generally been regulated strictly; often new retail developments would need to demonstrate that their settling would not disrupt the existing shopping centre hierarchy. In the 1990's, the national government even began acting proactively on this by providing guidelines for such large-scale retail locations. However, a small decentralisation was also started simultaneously, as municipalities were granted the authority to designate specific 'innovation' locations for new types of retail. But late into the 1990's, regional impact studies were often still required, and very strict criteria were used for 'peripheral' retail locations, especially for the (different types of) large-scale retail locations (Guy, 1998; Evers, 2002; Spierings, 2006). This seems to contrast developments in other European countries.

"While most other Western nations have, at one time or another, allowed retailers to construct large-scale hypermarkets and shopping malls outside or at the edge of major cities, the Dutch planning system has consistently frustrated, blocked and redirected this development." (Evers, 2002, p. 107).

Of course, this has had an impact on the current spatial structure and characteristics of the retail structures, as the number of 'peripheral' retail locations is still relatively small compared to other European countries. This is mostly attributed to former restrictions on retail types, products and floor space (Evers, 2002; Krabben, 2009).

In the 2000's important changes took place, as the government became aware that several different types of large-scale retail at 'peripheral' locations did not have a negative impact on the shopping centre hierarchy (Spierings, 2006).

"In the Netherlands, however, the proposal was made to abolish national restrictions regarding retail branches and sizes of shops at peripheral sites. Local authorities would become responsible for retail location policies at the local level. Provincial authorities would fulfil a supervisory role and also had to look after regional effects of new retail developments." (Spierings, 2006, p. 604).

This change outlined the new planning system, and also decreased the intervention role of the national government.

Current situation of retail planning in the Netherlands

The Netherlands recently shifted from a centralised model of retail planning to a decentralised model of retail planning (Spierings, 2006; Krabben, 2009). The national government wanted to 'pull back' out of its involvement in retail planning, which ultimately happened in the year of 2004 through the Nota Ruimte (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). This change left retail planning to other levels of government to be 'picked up'. Provinces and municipalities largely responded to this change by developing their own retail policies. The change happened fast because of the urgency of it, and because of that, the implementation of the governance structure's regional components, as well as conducting assessments of this institutional transformation's effectiveness, has proved to be difficult (Krabben, 2009). The government is still involved, and is also still responsible, but the specific responsibilities have shifted. The gravitational centre for decision-making on retail locations and retail restrictions now often lies at

the municipal level (Guy, 1998). Locally, locating new retail developments by municipalities often follows the following rule:

"[...] if the existing system is judged to be adequate, the new retailing should take place within centres which form part of this system: or, if the system is not adequate, then the state can specify where and what new development takes place." (Guy, 1998, p. 968).

Although there are possible exceptions if national or above-provincial interests are at stake, the Netherlands may now generally be considered to be a country with a decentralised retail planning system, with a lot of control at the municipal level. Interestingly, Guy's (1998) research dates from before the major institutional transformation of 2004, so the build-up towards a larger decentralisation may have already been initiated earlier in history.

One might ask if the retail planning system of the Netherlands has addressed some risks, such as the absence of legal powers for regional authorities, and the uncertainty on 'rules', which might hold back effective collaborative planning (Krabben, 2009). Policy responses indicate that still much effort is put into this. Of course, this began with the Nota Ruimte in 2004, which laid the foundation for the decentralisation (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). In 2013, the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations considered that provinces should have a directing role in retail planning, while simultaneously they also considered that provinces should reach out to support regions (Droogh Trommelen en Partners, 2013). The Retailagenda project in 2015 was very important for the retail sector of the Netherlands, as it established many different goals for addressing earlier institutional transformations. It was equally important for other governmental actors. It may be considered the national government's 'reaching out' towards provinces, regional authorities and municipalities, to support them in dealing with their new retail planning responsibilities (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2015; Keijzer, 2019). A framework for regional coordination was outlined, which was quickly followed by the provincial RetailDeals in 2016, which further elaborated the new roles of the provinces, and which summarised the provinces' efforts and measures for this. In these 'deals', the need for regional coordination was largely reconfirmed by provinces (Interprovinciaal Overleg, 2016). In 2017, a large sectoral interest group also responded to the government's responses, thereby aiming to accelerate the provinces' responses towards sectoral problems and regional coordination. Many problems, such as the retail planning overcapacity and the vacant retail properties, were addressed in their report, and the report seemed to consider that there was still room for improvement in the provinces' responses, and in regional governance (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017). In 2019, the Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and Climate Policy presented a progress report on the Retailagenda to the House of Representatives, which was accompanied by a follow-up proposition. The same problems are mentioned again, and although different spatial levels are affected, the regional level is considered to be crucial for addressing these problems (Keijzer, 2019). The proposed follow-up program indeed aims to address regional coordination to a greater extent (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). This was later followed by the development of different planning 'tools' for municipalities to address specific related problems, such as retail planning overcapacity and vacant retail properties, but also for the application of specific laws or regulations, and for the improvement of regional coordination (Retailagenda, 2019a; Retailagenda, 2019b; Rho Adviseurs et al., 2019; Stec Groep, 2019).

Current sectoral developments, problems and risks

As mentioned before, the retail sector of the Netherlands faces several problems and risks. Among them are also structural problems, such as the vacant retail property problem, which seems to be still present until now (Buitelaar et al., 2013; Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019). The prominence of long-term vacancies among vacant retail properties is often linked to the size upscaling of stores, combined with landlords generally being reluctant to lower the rents (Buitelaar et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2015). The size upscaling of stores has been a dominant trend in the Netherlands for a longer time now, possibly even for decades (Evers et al., 2011). Recent trends in this size upscaling of stores are shown in Figure 2.1. Over time, the retail offer in cities has also become more uniform, and smaller 'local' stores have a harder time to compete and survive in this environment. This seems to be put under further pressure by the rise of internet shopping (Krabben, 2013). Although internet shopping might change general shopping behaviour and the functions of 'physical' stores, there are still uncertainties over the effects of internet shopping on the overall retail property market, and also on the functioning of individual shopping areas (Locatus, 2017; Ploegmakers & Post, 2019). Internet shopping even might have strengthened the existing shopping centre hierarchy, because it allowed for a 'new arena' for different stores to compete and further consolidate their position. Large retail formulas may have been able to adapt more quickly and efficiently to this new development, and often may have had more resources at their disposal to develop online sales platforms, and thereby strengthen their (already dominant) market position to gain an additional advantage over smaller stores (Evers et al., 2011).

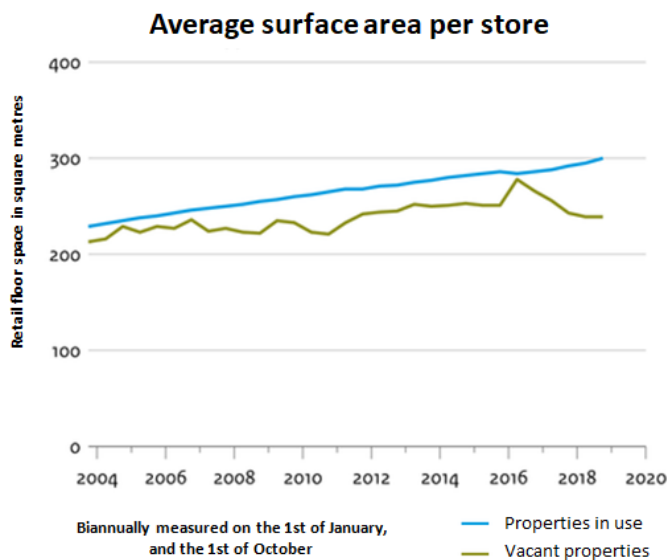


Figure 2.1: Average surface area per store in the Netherlands, measured in square metres. Derived from Locatus and Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (2019). Edited by Maxim Reinders (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019).

It is considered that the retail sector is important for employment possibilities; it may be one of the largest sectors of the Netherlands in terms of employment (Keijzer, 2019). However, new changes, problems and challenges seem to arise. One possible new problem is the increasing spatial variation within the currently existing problem of vacant retail properties. Nationally, the amount of vacant retail properties quickly rose from 6.7% to 7.3% between 2019 and 2020, thereby undoing years of previous decline (Slob, 2020). As can be seen in Figure 2.2., this increase

in vacant retail properties also applies to most provinces. However, this figure also shows that the differences between different provinces were already large to begin with.

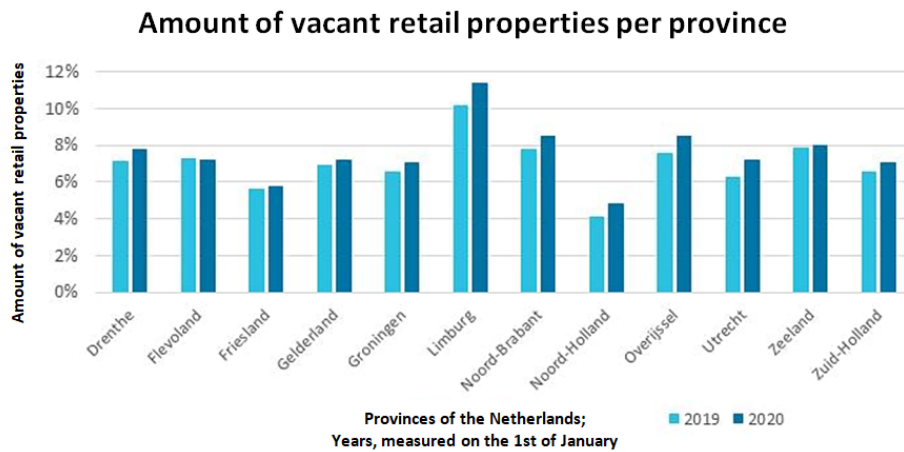


Figure 2.2: Amount of vacant retail properties in the Netherlands per province, measured as a percentage of the total amount of retail properties. Derived from Slob (2020). Edited by Maxim Reinders (Slob, 2020).

At smaller scale levels, the differences in vacant retail properties between different locations become even higher. In the latest overview maps from 2018, the locational differences become even more clear. Figure 2.3 shows the differences between different (statistically defined) regions, while Figure 2.4 shows the differences between individual municipalities. Between different (statistically defined) regions, the percentages of vacant retail floor space differ between 5.0% (and lower) and 12.5% (and higher), while between individual municipalities, the percentages of vacant retail floor space even differ between 5.0% (and lower) and 20.0% (and higher) (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019). In reality, the actual amount of vacant retail properties at specific locations may be even worse, because the overview maps only measure vacant floor space. And simultaneously, the average store size is still increasing (Evers et al., 2011). The closing of stores is not only caused by 'individual' stores closing, but also by large retail formulas closing their departments, and also by a stagnation in the take-up of retail properties by the hospitality industry, and a similar stagnation in the conversion of retail properties into housing (Slob, 2020). Another risk is 'locational sorting' because of increased competition between retail areas, which might contribute to city centres becoming more uniform (Evers et al., 2011; Krabben, 2013). The competition between different retail locations might also have partly contributed to the disproportionately large increase of vacant retail properties in the retail areas of city centres, compared to other retail areas (Slob, 2020). This increased competition might partly have been caused by the oversupply of 'peripheral' retail locations, especially furniture boulevards, but also by the use of disruptive tools like 'industry blurring' by large-scale retail types to be able to compete (Evers et al., 2011; Kooijman, 2013).

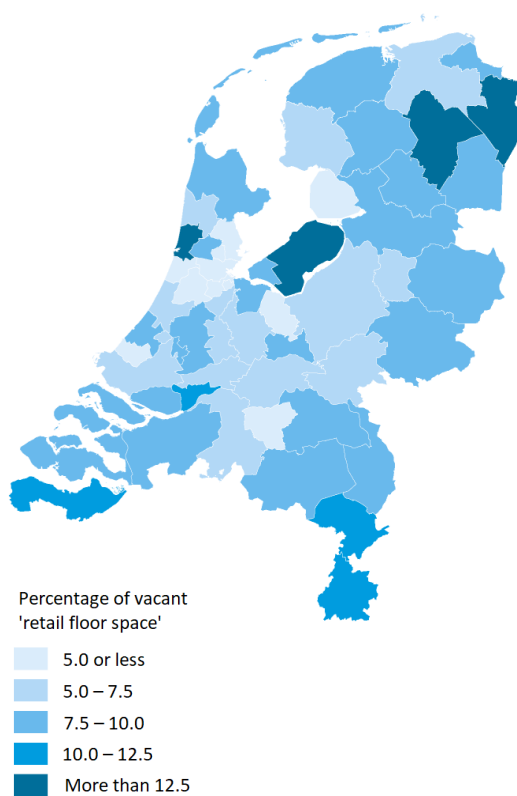


Figure 2.3: Vacant 'retail floor space' in the Netherlands per COROP-plus-area (region) in 2018 on October 1st, measured as a percentage of the total of available 'retail floor space'. Derived from Locatus and Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (2019). Edited by Maxim Reinders (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019).

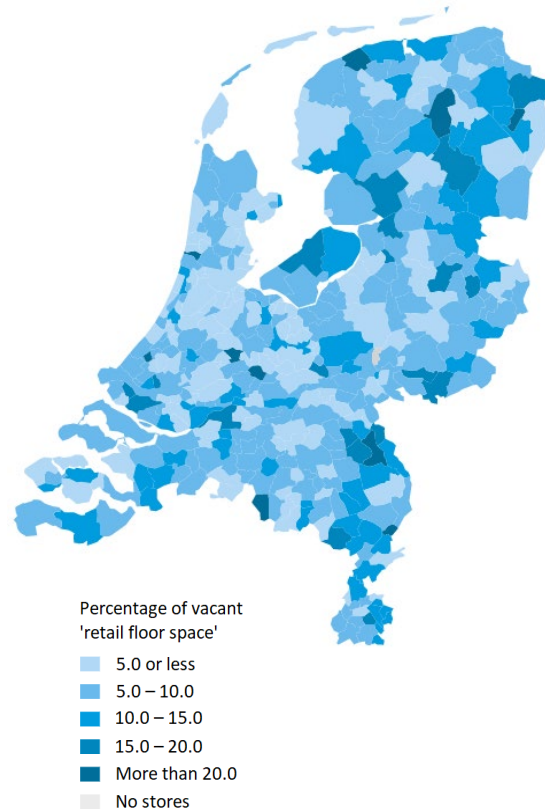


Figure 2.4: Vacant 'retail floor space' in the Netherlands per municipality in 2018 on October 1st, measured as a percentage of the total of available 'retail floor space'. Derived from Locatus and Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (2019). Edited by Maxim Reinders (Locatus; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2019).

The role of the national government changed considerably after the implementation of the Nota Ruimte in 2004 (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). National regulations and restrictions were abolished, and provinces, regions and municipalities were invited to develop their own retail planning policies (Krabben, 2009). However, the national government officially still has the goal to protect existing retail structures. Provincial retail planning policies still need to be approved by the national government before they can be implemented. It seemed that, in general, the retail sector in the Netherlands was not very positive about the national government abandoning its former restrictions on 'peripheral' retail locations, which might have contributed to the development of an additional guideline (Spierings, 2006). *"In 2005, a national guideline was added to ensure that new retail new retail locations would not be developed at the expense of existing parts of the retail structure. The preservation of city centres was mentioned in particular."* (Spierings, 2006, p. 607).

As mentioned before, after 2004 the provinces, regions and municipalities were invited to develop their own retail planning policies. For that purpose, they can use the spatial planning tools that they have at their disposal, such as the provincial structure plan, regional structure plan and municipal land-use plan (Krabben, 2009). The provinces generally took over the restrictive former national guidelines for 'peripheral' retail locations from the national government, and transformed them into provincial guidelines, in order to further protect city centres. Thereby they

preserved the idea that only types of retail that would not 'fit into' existing retail areas should be allowed at 'peripheral' retail locations, such as retail in hazardous or explosive materials, in bulky goods, in furniture, or 'do it yourself' stores. Overall, the provinces' new guidelines were largely consistent with former national guidelines. But now provinces had the freedom to add additional, stricter guidelines themselves (Spierings, 2006). However, there are differences between the 12 provinces' approaches in this regard. Directly after the implementation of the Nota Ruimte in 2004, it was already becoming clear that provinces would respond differently to the institutional transformation. Some provinces (such as Zuid-Holland), largely took over former national guidelines and restrictions to keep control, and thereby included specific segmentation requirements for retail at 'peripheral' locations. However, at the provincial level, these guidelines were adapted to include flexible parameters that could be changed later on, to be able to allow new market segments. Other provinces (such as Friesland) took the 'middle ground'. They only took over some of the strictest former national restrictions (such as the necessity for regional impact studies for large developments), but did not take over other guidelines, and largely left the freedom to add more restrictions at the discretion of municipalities. Still other provinces (such as Noord-Holland) decentralised retail planning to their municipalities almost entirely, which might have practically ignored municipalities' possibilities for coordinating retail guidelines or restrictions with the province (Krabben, 2009).

As a consequence of the differences between the provinces' approaches in the Netherlands, the retail planning guidelines and restrictions can be very different between different municipalities. However, for explaining the differences between individual municipalities, the regional level is also very important, as regions are administrative collaborations between different municipalities. Especially on the topic of retail developments at 'peripheral' locations, there are much differences between the approach of different regions. Many regions have the intention to coordinate large-scale retail developments at the regional level instead of the municipal level, but do not yet have the appropriate legal decision-making structure. The lack of such decision-making systems might be an obstacle to the effectiveness of collaborative planning, and even to local retail planning. However, in some provinces the provincial guidelines leave room for developing detailed and well-elaborated regional structures, which give decisions from regional authorities 'legal' status, and which provides for a regional impact on local retail planning (Krabben, 2009). *"Regional impact studies are required for all development plans and municipal or private sector initiatives cannot take place without the approval of the regional planning commission."* (Krabben, 2009, p. 1045). But the aforementioned does not apply to all regions in the Netherlands. In many regions, regional authorities can not withhold planning permission for specific retail plans. For individual municipalities, it is often the case that they indeed try to maintain the existing hierarchy of shopping centres with the tools that they have in spatial planning (Needham, 2016). New types of large-scale retail are mostly redirected to 'peripheral' locations outside of towns by most municipalities, and the range of retail types that are allowed there was generally limited by municipalities. Pressure from retail and property developers, as well as from consumers, increased the accessibility of such 'peripheral' retail locations, and also widened the range of retail types that was allowed there. However, often provincial guidelines still make it possible for municipalities to exclude specific types of retail from such locations, if they are considered to be disruptive to the existing shopping centre hierarchy, or if they are considered to be too competitive. Such retail developments are then redirected to yet another type of specifically designated retail location. It seems that in general, municipalities want to

avoid competition between retail areas, and also want to avoid competition with other municipalities (Needham, 2016).

“In practice, not many big all-purpose shopping centres have been built outside the built-up areas: [...] municipalities do not want the competition with their town centres, and if another municipality does want such a centre the surrounding municipalities put the province under pressure to refuse it: provinces usually want the existing centres to remain strong.” (Needham, 2016, pp. 50-51).

2.1.2 Multi-level governance

Defining multi-level governance

For understanding the theory of this research, it is important to further investigate the concept of multi-level governance. In the policy field of retail planning, but also in many other policy fields, there are often different policies established at different spatial (or governmental) levels. These might be considered to be different layers of policies, but often they do interact with one another. Although such policies might aim to manage the same situation or process, they do not necessarily have to align. Policies from different governmental levels which are simultaneously managing the same process, might lead to a situation that may be described as ‘multi-level governance’, a specific type of governance.

But what exactly is multi-level governance? It seems that it may be defined as a new type of governance. In her theories, Healey (2006) describes how, from the 1980’s onwards, the ‘old’ way of comprehensive spatial planning started to gradually disappear, and was ultimately replaced through a thematic fragmentation into different spatial planning disciplines (Healey, 2006). At the same time, new experimental types of governance, partnerships and projects started to arise in spatial planning. *“Instead of nesting neatly in a hierarchical model of levels of government responsibility, new urban governance arenas and practices were introduced which drew in actors from a variety of different levels of government [...]”* (Healey, 2006, pp. 300-301). Older definitions of multi-level governance aim to differentiate the concept based on its most distinguishable characteristics, namely by looking at the decision-making process (Marks, 1996). Thus it is defined by *“[...] the sum of rules, mainly formal but also informal, concerning the locus and practice of authoritative governance in polity.”* (Marks, 1996, p. 22). Marks (1996) further makes a distinction between political rules and political actors, as rules limit such actors, but rules may also be changed by such actors. This sketches a broad framework for multi-level governance systems. Later on, Peters and Pierre (2001) focused on the development of intergovernmental relations in their study, and thus included the dimension of actor interactions into the concept (Peters & Pierre, 2001). *“[...] it refers to negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions at the transnational, national, regional and local levels”* (Peters & Pierre, 2001, p. 131). With this information, multi-level governance may be placed in Giddens’ (1984) encompassing societal theories on structure and agency, as multi-level governance seems to include both structures (institutions and rules, both formal and informal), as well as agency (actor relationships, and coordination, negotiation, and decision-making processes) (Giddens, 1984). As the first definition of Marks (1996) also seems to include hierarchical decision-making, it might be important to make a distinction between hierarchical and non-hierarchical exchanges. Next to

these definitions, Peters and Pierre (2001) introduce the ideas that different governance processes might interact with one another (instead of just the political actors), and that in negotiation, hierarchically established levels may be 'bypassed' as a form of networking. Piattoni (2009) carried out both a historical and conceptual analysis into the concept of multi-level governance, where her historical analysis leads to an inclusive definition (Piattoni, 2009).

"The term multi-level governance denotes a diverse set of arrangements, a panoply of systems of coordination and negotiation, among formally independent but functionally interdependent entities that stand in complex relations to one another and that, through coordination and negotiation, keep redefining the interrelations." (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008; Piattoni, 2009, p. 172).

Thus it seems that for defining multi-level governance, we also have to look at arrangements between actors, at systems of coordination and negotiation (interaction), and complex relationships. The essential core characteristics of multi-level governance seems to be its (informal) coordination and negotiation processes, which continuously keep redefining the relationships between actors (Piattoni, 2009). For describing interactions between different governmental levels, Piattoni (2009) describes two separate dimensions: the spatial dimension (also named the jurisdictional or territorial dimension), and the relational dimension. In the spatial dimension, she looks at the authority that governmental actors hold over a demarcated geographic area and its inhabitants. This dimension applies for many governmental actors, such as municipalities and provinces. They have an interest in the wellbeing and 'good performance' of their area and its inhabitants, as well as in maintaining its (spatial) cohesion. In the relational dimension, she looks at the official responsibilities that governmental actors have for a demarcated geographic area and its inhabitants, for which they need to interact with other governmental actors, in order to meet those responsibilities, to maintain political (representative) legitimacy, and to maintain their relational position.

As an example of what actually constitutes multi-level governance in practice, Sabel and Zeitlin (2008) describe the decision-making system of the European Union. This might be considered a 'multi-level governance' system, because its decision-making system connects different national governments within the European Union, without establishing a hierarchy. In practice, influences in the European Union can go both ways; from the national governments to the European Union, and vice versa (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). They also mentioned different 'process' characteristics of multi-level governance systems. In multi-level governance, coordination and negotiation may be used to prevent individual actors from using 'formal' veto powers. As the governance system's focus on networking may not be defined by a centralised or decentralised decision-making system (such as in the European Union), they conclude that also the division of roles for actors (for labour, management, or enforcement) may also be different in a 'multi-level governance' system. *"The most successful of these arrangements combine the advantages of decentralised local experimentation with those of centralised coordination, and so blur the distinction between forms of governance often held to have incompatible virtues."* (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008, p. 275).

The most comprehensive 'working definition' of multi-level governance seems to be Piattoni's (2009), although its specific focus does not seem to include the formal interactions (coordination or negotiation) between actors, while the importance of rules does not seem to be

elaborated. However, there are many similarities between the different approaches and studies. A single, encompassing definition of multi-level governance might not be a realistic goal, and might also not be practical in this research. But a comparison of aforementioned approaches and studies might reveal a useful set of shared characteristics. The following shared characteristics of multi-level governance can be defined:

- Multi-level governance seems to refer to a system of actors, in which the processes of coordination and negotiation between these actors continuously redefine the aforementioned coordination and negotiation processes themselves. The actors can be formally independent (Piattoni, 2009);
- Interactions (coordination or negotiation) between different levels can have two natures (based on their dimension). Interactions of a spatial nature are concerned with coordination or negotiation on the authority over a specific spatial area or its inhabitants. Interactions of a relational nature are concerned with coordination or negotiation on actors' responsibilities, relational integrity (legitimacy, consensus, or accountability) and maintaining relational positions (Piattoni, 2009);
- Coordination or negotiation between actors of different levels is at the core. Multi-level governance is broader than decision-making, because it adds the dimension of networking between different levels. A system of multi-level governance can also create new roles for actors (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008);
- The non-hierarchical exchanges and negotiations between actors of different levels seem to be of the highest importance, in which both the involved actors and their interaction processes (coordination and negotiation) are important (Peters & Pierre, 2001);
- Multi-level governance seems to include all rules between actors about decision-making, both formal and informal, as well as the hierarchical structure of decision-making. Rules should be taken into account because rules limit interactions, but are also changed by interactions (Marks, 1996);
- Multi-level governance does indeed seem to be a new type of governance because it does not 'neatly' fit into the hierarchical model of government responsibility, while at the same time, it is still built around the involvement of different government levels (Healey, 2006).

Effects of multi-level governance in casestudies

This research builds on different theories and research examples, which demonstrate that multi-level governance may be present in different fields or disciplines of spatial planning, and may have an actual influence. Sometimes only certain elements of it seem to be present in specific cases. Multi-level governance seems to have been present in research by Ploegmakers and Beckers (2015) on urban regeneration initiatives in rundown industrial areas in the Netherlands (Ploegmakers & Beckers, 2015). They mention that, even though the Dutch national planning culture is characterised by having high environmental standards, with the institutional space for more governmental interventions, it still has been shown that political factors influence the choice of the target location for industrial regeneration initiatives. Implementation is often also (partly) subject to political decision-making. Both influences may have hindered the reaching of certain project goals. Thus it seems that, in spatial planning, political decision-making may have an impact on plan implementation and plan effectiveness in some cases.

Multi-level governance also seems to be present in research about the decision-making on the supply of serviced building land, as this decision-making seems to be partly driven or motivated by municipalities' 'quest for control' (Ploegmakers et al., 2013). This 'quest for control' touches upon Piattoni's (2009) concept of interactions of a spatial nature, as this seems to fit with actors' authority over a geographic area and its inhabitants. Although this is not further elaborated in their study, a reference is made to the possible role of interactions between different actors, and how these may have continuously influenced the actors' abilities and decision-making over time (Hodgson, 1997; Ploegmakers et al., 2013). Hodgson's (1997) research on habits and rules in decision-making situations concluded that empirical epistemology is limited for explaining the behaviour of actors, mainly because rationality is limited. But actors ultimately need socially developed character traits like cognition, enquiry, and learning. It means that the interactions between actors at different levels might have a significant influence on their decision-making process, which provides an argument for the importance of multi-level governance in the process.

Multi-level governance also seems to be present in a case elaborated by Verduijn et al. (2015), who researched the 'agency' perspective in Dutch 'nature development' policies (policies which are often called 'ecological restoration' policies in other countries). For explaining the role of multi-level governance in this specific case, it is important to establish the concept of policy entrepreneurs¹. In their function, policy entrepreneurs are usually the first actors (or 'agents') to encounter actors at different governmental levels outside of their own, and are thus the first ones that have to deal with the complexity of governance at different levels. *"Policy entrepreneurs operate within complex multi-level governance networks, which is why networking strategies constitute the keys to success."* (Verduijn et al., 2015, p. 59). This seems to partly connect to the dimension of (non-hierarchical) networking between different governance levels, which was mentioned by Sabel and Zeitlin (2008), while the non-hierarchical element was highlighted by Peters and Pierre (2001). In the first phase of this case, multi-level governance seems to have played a minor role for one particular policy change: the adoption of 'nature development' policies. In 1990, the national government's 'Nature Policy Plan' involved the development of an ecological network of connected nature areas (EHS), which was proposed because of good research results with spontaneous ecosystem development at an abandoned industrial area. The change was caused by policy entrepreneurs at a ministry that framed the (new) concept of 'nature development' into the 'policy-language' of the responsible ministries. Combined with additional research, this effort in 'policy-language' by policy entrepreneurs largely convinced the national government to adopt this new strategy of 'nature development'. Over time, the strategy of 'nature development' was more widely used in the policy field of nature conservation, in several large projects, such as transforming agricultural land into floodplains. Thus, in this phase of the case, multi-level governance seems to have been present at the perspective of the policy entrepreneurs. The policy entrepreneurs acted as 'agents' to make sure that the new strategy was accepted at higher governmental levels. At the same time, other policy entrepreneurs aimed for the strategy to be used at 'lower' governmental levels, in the practical implementation of projects

¹ There are different definitions of policy entrepreneurs. *"A policy entrepreneur is an actor who advocates and seeks to change policy by exploiting opportunities and employing entrepreneurial strategies [...]"* (Verduijn et al., 2015, p. 56; Kingdon, 2014). Kingdon (2014) defines policy entrepreneurs as *"[...] people who are willing to invest their resources in pushing their pet proposals or problems, are responsible not only for prompting important people to pay attention, but also for coupling solutions to problems and for coupling both problems and solution to politics [...]"* (Kingdon, 2014, p. 20).

by municipalities and local water authorities. This implementation resulted in additional project results and research data, which again further supported and reinforced the adoption of this strategy by higher governmental levels.

In the second phase of this case, multi-level governance also seems to have played a role, albeit a more prominent one. Because of aforementioned developments, between the 1990's and the 2010's the national government had been largely optimistic about further developing its ecological network (EHS), and applying new 'nature development' strategies to it. Path-dependency now played a role as well, as some governmental actors developed their new plans based on the strategy of 'nature development'. *"Under the supervision of the provinces, a coalition of Staatsbosbeheer, municipalities, nature organisations and land-owners drafted plans for creating a robust connection between the Oostvaardersplassen and the largest Dutch forest area, the Veluwe [...]"* (Verduijn et al., 2015, p. 68). However, in 2010 a political change changed the government's composition and perspective. Support for 'nature development' strategies waned, and the large plans for connecting nature areas with corridors (which were supervised by the provinces) were cancelled, which led to lawsuits at the highest spatial planning authorities. *"The provinces, [...], with whom the national government had reached financial agreements earlier, and who had put a lot of effort into generating support for realising nature, were furious, and so were most nature organisations and experts [...]"* (Verduijn et al., 2015, p. 69). Ultimately, the 'new' policy direction was persevered. Simultaneously, the responsibility for nature conservation (and thus not nature development) was largely decentralised to the provinces. Thus, in this second phase, multi-level governance seems to have been present in different ways. The national government initiated a 'new' policy change, which provinces and other governmental authorities disagreed with. It is uncertain if there was an interaction process, but it is clear that ultimately different levels of government resolved their issues and differences of opinion through legal means. What is also relevant, is that the policy change led to a decentralisation of policy competencies. This seems to connect to the dichotomy between centralisation and decentralisation that Sabel and Zeitlin (2008) described. However, in this case 'decentralised local experimentation' (combined with networking at other governmental levels) did not lead to a definitive policy change, as ultimately a reversal happened. However, through the eventual decentralisation of policy competencies (by decentralising nature conservation responsibilities to provinces), one might say that it did lead to a change of roles for different governmental actors (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008; Verduijn et al., 2015). Ultimately, it seems that in several different cases, systems (or characteristics) of multi-level governance may have had an impact on spatial planning in practice.

Supposed advantages and disadvantages of multi-level governance

Systems of multi-level governance are supposed to have certain advantages, which follow from both conceptual research into governance structures, as well as from practically studied cases. One of the supposed advantages of multi-level governance is the presumed efficiency of the governance system opposed to central government control. This increased (practical) efficiency is reflected by the idea that if different governmental levels can operate more autonomously, they can govern their own specific (geographic) area in a more specialised way, which would leave more room for local customisation and taking into account local circumstances (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Next to that, it would leave more room to address negative externalities, as it would provide for coordination between different governmental levels about such matters, and also for

employment of a governmental actor's specific expertise. An externality that surfaces at multiple levels, may thus be addressed more efficiently.

"Because externalities arising from the provision of public goods vary immensely—from planet-wide in the case of global warming to local in the case of most city services—so should the scale of governance. To internalize externalities, governance must be multi-level. This is the core argument for multi-level governance [...]" (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 4).

Multi-level governance might also increase democratisation, because it transfers the decision-making process to lower administrative and governmental levels. In that way, more of the interests of local stakeholders (such as companies and inhabitants) might be represented at higher governmental levels. 'Lower' governmental levels can better reflect the range of different interests of local stakeholders, so coordination with them can lead to a higher democratisation. One other advantage of multi-level governance might be that it leaves increased room for competition between different governmental levels. This connects to Piattoni's (2009) explanation of how multi-level governance challenges certain assumptions about liberal inter-governmentalism. Under 'normal' inter-governmentalism, higher levels of government aggregate the interests of 'lower' levels of government. However, non-hierarchical negotiation between different governmental actors seems to challenge that concept. As an example, Piattoni (2009) names the European Union. At the European Union, several sub-national governmental actors (such as provinces and regions) are negotiating and influencing decision-making without explicit 'permission' from their own national governments, just as some NGOs do. National governments may no longer act as the sole representatives of legitimate domestic interests from their country; they are no longer the 'gatekeepers'.

One supposed disadvantage of multi-level governance can be described as the 'coordination dilemma'. In general, if more different governmental levels coordinate and negotiate with each other, there will be more interactions. This will lead to a higher amount of possible solutions that needs to be negotiated between actors, which will ultimately increase the transactions costs (and thereby the overall costs). This is known as the 'coordination dilemma' (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Furthermore, a higher number of actors at the 'negotiation table' has the potential risk of creating situations that may be described as a so-called 'prisoner's dilemma', and 'free riding'.

"As the number of actors rises beyond two, it becomes harder to punish defectors. Free riding is the dominant strategy in the absence of a leviathan or of the countervailing norms that can induce a sufficiently large proportion of actors to monitor and punish defection. This is, in a nutshell, the dilemma of multi-level governance." (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 12).

At the same time, 'norms on adherence' might be shared more among actors if the amount of actors is lower. According to Piattoni (2009), systems with multi-level governance may also have the disadvantage of a decreased democratic legitimacy, especially in cases where sub-national authorities or NGOs have a place at the negotiation table; these actors were not democratically 'elected' to that level, but are still allowed to represent their interests there. This might

unwillingly legitimise a specific NGO, which might be considered problematic for some political theories' perspectives. However, this problem seems to mostly apply to international cases of multi-level governance. There are also specific disadvantages of multi-level governance that mainly apply to 'Type I' governance systems; a distinction that was made by Hooghe and Marks (2001), and which is explained further on. 'Type I' governance systems seem to be the type that is most prevalent in the Netherlands. Often their disadvantages are: (1) they are difficult to change because of shared responsibilities and shared policy competencies (and decision-making) between different levels; (2) the shared responsibilities and organisation structure complicate the implementation of solutions; (3) external 'last resort' authorities may have an interest in using 'established' solutions to prevent changes to the governance system (and their own position); (4) all changes may be difficult because such governance structures depend on a deliberate choice in the concentration of power (and specific competencies) with certain levels or actors; (5) a solution to 'remove' a governance level may never be implemented because of the high amount of interdependencies between different governance levels. The only alternative is a redistribution of responsibilities, competencies, or tasks over existing governance levels; (6) existing governance levels, actors or authorities may become 'magnets' for being assigned additional responsibilities and competencies, even though this may not be efficient, simply because the costs for creating a 'new' governance level or authority are often higher than the costs of re-assigning tasks and responsibilities within the current governance structure; (7) processes like nationalism, traditionalism, and authoritarianism may increase resistance against institutional change (or reforms) of 'Type I' governance systems, because citizens often attribute 'meaning' to its components (even though such components may have been artificially created). Citizens' spatial identification and community bonding are often (in some way) connected to notions of being a citizen of a certain province, region or municipality. Changing such governance levels (or their responsibilities) may be difficult because of aforementioned problem (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

2.1.3 Applying multi-level governance to retail planning in the Netherlands

Multi-level governance and spatial planning

According to Hooghe and Marks (2001), who compared different types of multi-level governance, there are generally two types of multi-level governance: 'Type I' governance and 'Type II' governance, which were already referred to. Depending on the (local) context, country, history, traditions, and public administration systems, systems of multi-level governance can display different elements from either 'Type I' or 'Type II' multi-level governance. For 'Type I' governance, the different governance layers are not overlapping, and do not intersect with territorial boundaries. At higher levels the scaled size of governance layers increases, and responsibilities and competencies are often shared by different levels. Specialised 'leftover' responsibilities are bundled and taken over by a specific authority (such as a national forestry authority). There is often a 'last resort' legal option placed outside or above the system, such as an arbitration court, to resolve conflicts or issues. Such governance systems are often artificially created, as they do not develop naturally. For 'Type II' governance, there is usually a much higher number of governance levels. These levels have very specific policy competencies, which are not shared with other governance levels. Levels are passive towards each other, and are primarily focused on solving the issues and externalities associated with their own assigned competencies. Layers of

governance consist of specialists, not generalists. The internal structure of each governance layer is mainly organised around the (sectoral) problems that need to be addressed. Coordination is minimised, while specialisation is optimised. The main differences between the two types are summarised in Figure 2.5.

In many situations, these two types of governance can be clearly distinguished from each other. But in practice, they can often also coexist. Especially in countries that are federal unions, where individual states have a high degree of autonomy (such as the United States of America), such coexistences are likely. Within the European Union, ‘Type I’ governance structures are the most prevalent among countries with a (currently) strong decentralisation process, such as the Netherlands. Many European countries simultaneously empowered both subnational institutions and supranational institutions. Unfortunately, Hooghe and Marks (2001) use the indicator ‘regionalisation’ (the empowerment of regional governments) to measure subnational empowerment. In the Netherlands, regions are not an official layer of government, but administrative collaborations between individual municipalities (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017). Still, they may act as governmental authorities in the policy fields for which they received official responsibilities and competencies by ‘higher’ governmental actors, such as the policy field of retail planning. It seems that a regional governance structure in retail planning has not yet been fully implemented in the Netherlands, which was already explained in the earlier sub-chapter about spatial planning in the retail sector of the Netherlands (Krabben, 2009). Despite missing this regional governance system, the Dutch retail planning system may indeed be considered to be very decentralised (Spierings, 2006).

TYPE I	TYPE II
<i>multi-task</i> jurisdictions	<i>task-specific</i> jurisdictions
<i>mutually exclusive</i> jurisdictions at any particular level	<i>overlapping</i> jurisdictions at all levels
<i>limited</i> number of jurisdictions	<i>unlimited</i> number of jurisdictions
jurisdictions organized in a <i>limited number of levels</i>	<i>no limit</i> to the number of jurisdictional levels
jurisdictions are intended to be <i>permanent</i>	jurisdictions are intended to be <i>flexible</i>

Figure 2.5: Types of multi-level governance, derived from Hooghe and Marks (2001) (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

2.2 Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning

The theoretical framework of this research provides the three central research concepts on which this research will further focus. In chapter ‘2.3 Conceptual model’, it is further explained what these choices are based on, and it is also illustrated which influences these research concepts are presumed to have. The three chosen central research concepts are:

- Multi-level governance;
- Municipal decision-making;
- The effectiveness of municipal retail planning.

However, most elaborations in the theoretical framework have a largely theoretical focus. For measuring the research concepts, they first need to be translated into measurable indicators. This sub-chapter serves as the operationalisation of these research concepts, and uses additional theories and studies for that. All three central research concepts have been divided into different dimensions, to which groups of relevant and theoretically coherent indicators are attributed.

2.2.1 Measuring multi-level governance

First dimension: decentralisation of retail planning competencies

The use of this dimension is justified by theories of Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Prud'homme (1995) (Prud'homme, 1995). The indicators are:

- The convincingness of an actor's argument for its involvement in the development of strategic plans in retail planning;
- The number of (governmental) actors from different jurisdictions having an influence on retail planning in the municipality;
- The experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external (governmental) actors;
- The experienced freedom by an actor to implement funding into projects (operational plans) for retail planning.

Prud'homme (1995) focuses on the allocation of authority over policy areas, and the need to draw inventories of these policy areas. He argues that multiple governance levels can simultaneously have convincing arguments to be involved in the provision of a certain service, while still having equally legitimate interests. For some government services, such as primary education, the involvement of different levels (with different roles) is even necessary. Because the convincingness of arguments to be involved plays an important role in his research, this has been included as an indicator. This indicator is: the convincingness of an actor's argument for its involvement in the development of strategic plans in retail planning.

Hooghe and Marks (2001) mention that the number of (involved) governance levels in a certain policy field is not a very explanatory indicator of multi-level governance. Still, it is used as a relevant approximation to measuring multi-level governance, because multi-level governance generally increases with a higher number of (involved) governance levels. To increase the weight and explanatory value of this indicator, a practical focus is put on how these involved governance levels that are identified, actually influence the policy field. Although the indicator is explicitly not limited to merely identifying the number of governance layers or administrative layers, the developed indicator is formulated as follows, for the sake of clarity: the number of (governmental) actors from different jurisdictions having an influence on retail planning in the municipality.

In contrast with external influences, it is also important to consider how much control municipalities themselves have over retail planning. Hooghe and Marks (2001) measure multi-level governance by looking at the distribution of policy competencies over different governance levels, which is a method that is mentioned to be often used by researchers that study decentralisation processes. Smith (1997) mentions that it is important to look at imbalances in policy networks, and to take into account hierarchies (Smith, 1997). In his research on the effects of multi-level governance in the distribution of European Union structural funds, complicated

processes in multi-level governance led to an imbalance between municipal planning competencies (and control) and external funding for municipalities or regions. Both studies seem to make the assumption that multi-level governance is connected to the balancing within the distribution of policy competencies. Since it also seems that an actor's control over policy content should therefore not be taken for granted, and should therefore not be (solely) be based on the 'perceived' hierarchy, the amount of authority that municipalities have in the field of retail planning was taken into account as an indicator. This indicator is: the experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external (governmental) actors.

For measuring the decentralisation of retail planning competencies, it is also important to take into account the fiscal power of (governmental) actors. This is because the power to tax and spend, as well as the power to make decisions to assign funding for individual projects, can explain a lot about multi-level governance (Smith, 1997). Additionally, a governmental actor's ability to acquire a particular grant, and the associated ability to direct this grant towards the actor's objectives and projects, may reflect the actor's legitimacy in relationships between different governance levels. This is because in that way, they can maintain traditional 'local-sectoral relationships'. These abilities have been (partly) taken into account as an indicator. This indicator is: the experienced freedom by an actor to implement funding into projects (operational plans) for retail planning.

Second dimension: quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors

The use of this dimension is justified by research from Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Prud'homme (1995), as both studies frequently address the importance of (formal and informal) relationships between governance levels. Besides the distribution of policy competencies and financial control, this is described as a very important dimension. The indicators are:

- The actor's experience with hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors;
- The actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic plans to local spatial policy (or its help or support therein);
- The actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce;
- The actor's experience with formal rules that constrain the relationships/interaction/cooperation with other (governmental) actors;
- The experienced change in the actor's relationship with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors after the recent major policy reform in retail planning (in 2004).

The studies by Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Prud'homme (1995) both aim to answer the question on how actors from different governance levels should interact with each other. For this, Hooghe and Marks (2001) look at the presence of a hierarchy in the relationships between governance levels. *"Are the relationships characterized by hierarchy, do they reflect mutual dependence, asymmetrical dependence, or relative independence?"* (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 2). An indicator was developed based on this experience of a hierarchy. This indicator is: the actor's experience with hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors.

Prud'homme (1995) is concerned with finding the most optimal status quo in cooperation between governance levels. Generally, he considers that multiple levels of governance should

cooperate in the provision of services, as this is the most effective way. *“The problem therefore is to determine how the different levels of government could and should cooperate.”* (Prud'homme, 1995, p. 218). Because decentralisation only applies to certain policy fields, municipalities have more responsibilities in some policy fields than in other policy fields; this depends on the type of public service. Therefore, one should additionally look at the governmental actor's role, and the function of this role within the concerned policy field. An indicator was based on this, which is: the actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic plans to local spatial policy (or its help or support therein).

Additionally, Hooghe and Marks (2001) look at the behaviour used by actors to 'smooth out' and streamline interactions between different (governmental) actors in the form of regular meetings. The results of such routine meetings may reflect the actors' legitimacy, if these results are caused by such streamlining behaviour. Therefore, both the experienced importance of such meetings, as well as possible legitimacy that actors may derive from the results of such meetings, were developed into an indicator. This indicator is: the actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce.

Hooghe and Marks (2001) also look at the formal regulations that apply to the relationships between governmental actors of different levels, or that, as they name it, 'govern' such relationships. These may for example be formal rules about representation at 'higher' levels, or about decision-making (such as rules on decision-making possibilities to hold back plans). In earlier research, Marks (1996) also took these rules into account as 'political rules', because they apply to (political) decision-making processes, but are also the result of (political) decision-making processes (Marks, 1996). Actors' experience with such rules was taken into account as an indicator. This indicator is: the actor's experience with formal rules that constrain the relationships/interaction/cooperation with other (governmental) actors.

Smith (1997) proposes that, in addition to 'orthodox' approaches of studying multi-level governance, more sociological and anthropological variables should be included in studies on multi-level governance. Such variables should also be studied in a time perspective. As an example, he mentions that it is important to compare relationships between different governance levels before and after major reforms in the policy field, and to pay specific attention to changes in these relationships. An indicator was based on this that took the impact of policy field reforms into account. For the field of retail planning, the chosen policy field reform is the implementation of the Nota Ruimte in 2004, which caused the largest decentralisation in the policy field of retail planning (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004; Krabben, 2009). This indicator is: the experienced change in the actor's relationship with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors after the recent major policy reform in retail planning (in 2004).

2.2.2 Measuring municipal decision-making

First dimension: leadership legitimacy

The use of this dimension is justified by research from Smith (1997), who takes into account the role of actors' leadership legitimacy for decision-making processes in policymaking. The indicators are:

- The actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders;
- The perceived necessity by municipalities to make (or negotiate for) strategic retail plans for larger regions.

Smith (1997) mentions that in multi-level governance, governmental actors often have roles with a dual nature. Representatives of the actor both represent a geographic area and its inhabitants, as well as 'the government'. The first is often true because the leadership or 'formal government' of such actors consists of politically elected officials that represent the interests of inhabitants, which elected them. The second is often also true because of this same reason. The actor's 'formal government' is considered the 'highest' governmental authority at a specific spatial level, and therefore a representative of the national government. In that capacity, elected officials of the actor's 'formal government' may serve as an alderman or executive, and thereby acquire official responsibility as a policy-expert for a specific policy field. They become the official 'point of contact' for inhabitants, stakeholders, and sectoral interest groups at that spatial level. However, for that first function (representing a geographic area and its inhabitants), a decrease in leadership legitimacy from that actor may (indirectly) negatively influence political manoeuvring space of the elected officials. It may also decrease inhabitants' identification with the governmental actor. *"Part of this legitimacy hinges upon how each leader appears to fare in confrontations with leaders of other bodies."* (Smith, 1997, p. 715). In other words, it seems that a negative perception on how the governmental actor (or its leaders) fare in disagreements with other governmental actors, might negatively impact the governmental actor's perceived leadership legitimacy. Subsequently, this might negatively impact the governmental actor's 'spatial representation', and therefore its role in multi-level governance. Therefore, this concept has been included as an indicator. This indicator is: the actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders.

Smith (1997) also mentions that it is important to look at the (governmental) actor's perceived necessity to make strategic plans for larger regions, especially in the case of smaller governmental actors (such as municipalities). This is based on the assumption that the extent to which decision-making is negotiation-based, and thus based on consensus-based coalitions, is very important. At 'higher' governance levels, negotiation may have a larger influence on decision-making. Therefore, he considers it to be important to look at the necessity that 'local' actors experience to make larger plans, or plans with a larger perspective. An indicator was based on this. This indicator is: the perceived necessity by municipalities to make (or negotiate for) strategic retail plans for larger regions.

Second dimension: inclusion of strategic plans into decision-making

The use of this dimension is justified by a research conducted by Faludi (1989), and Mastop and Faludi (1997), because both studies on the assessment of strategic plans seemed to confirm the importance of measuring the conformance and performance of strategic plans (Faludi, 1989; Mastop & Faludi, 1997). The use of this distinction between conformance and performance is also supported by Rudolf Rudolf and Grădinaru's (2019) research, further on (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019). The indicators are:

- The extent to which arguments behind operational decisions reflect the strategic plan;
- The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's knowledge and interpretation of the strategic plan behind operational decisions;
- The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's acceptance and use of the strategic plan as part of operational decision situations.

In 1989, Faludi (1989) researched different ways to evaluate plans in spatial planning, and makes a distinction in decision-making between projects (operational plans) and strategic plans, which is important for evaluation.

“Project plans are the blueprints where implementation is unproblematic and outcomes are expected to conform to intentions. Strategic plans are momentary agreement records of various projects considered at different points in time by the participants. The future remains open. Decisionmakers who use them must perform.” (Faludi, 1989, p. 135).

For strategic plans, he considers that measuring their effectiveness is not possible by comparing physical outcomes with plan intentions, as in practice, strategic plans have to guide project plans. Therefore, he looks at whether or not strategic plans facilitate decision-making. For that, he looks at the connection between operational decisions and the arguments behind them, as that might expose the (possible) facilitation of decision-making.

“The first requirement of analysing performance is to establish where departure from the plan occurs. [...] Each decision must be assessed in the light of the plan. The aim is not to assess decisions for their substantive merits, but to establish arguments which have led to the eventual outcome, and how, if at all, those arguments have been influenced by the plan.” (Faludi, 1989, p. 146).

Based on this an indicator was developed. This indicator is: the extent to which arguments behind operational decisions reflect the strategic plan.

In his research, Faludi (1989) also mentions three basic conditions to adhere to for strategic plans to be effective (and for assessing decision-making), which are based on an earlier study by Mastop and Faludi (1997). In Faludi's (1989) later study, two of those criteria are considered to be the most relevant: (1) the experienced long-term relevance of the plan by the recipient; (2) the plan's straightforward assistance in giving instructions for operational decision situations. Earlier this was mentioned as the explicit consideration that the operational decision-maker should have knowledge of the plan. An indicator was based on this. This indicator is: the extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's knowledge and interpretation of the strategic plan behind operational decisions.

In this same study, Mastop and Faludi (1997) mention that the interpretation of the strategic plan might possibly be even more important, although 'general' knowledge of the strategic plan is of course a precondition for interpretation. *“For achieving the goals of the plan, the plan-maker depends on the recipients. Performance analysis must therefore focus on the latter and ask: Have they received the message? Did the message form a relevant input into their deliberations?”* (Mastop & Faludi, 1997, p. 829). In Faludi's (1989) earlier study, this is summarised as the decision-makers' acceptance of the strategic plan as part of operational

decision situations. An indicator was based on this. This indicator is: the extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's acceptance and use of the strategic plan as part of operational decision situations.

2.2.3 Measuring the effectiveness of municipal retail planning

Single dimension: quality of local plans

The use of this dimension is justified by research conducted by Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), who researched and compared different ways to evaluate local plans (which they refer to as master plans) (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019). Their framework scores plans on four dimension (or plan types), namely “[...] *visions, blueprints, communicative policy acts, and basic plans* [...]” (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 880). They consider that strategic plans (and thus retail visions) have characteristics of two types of plans, namely visions (which are communication-oriented and aimed at defining common goals) and blueprints (which are action-oriented, precise, and focused on tasks for reaching specific outcomes), although they are closer to visions. Their method of local plan evaluation is an integrated method, and thus not specifically sided on performance- or conformance-based evaluation². To assess the quality of strategic plans and investigate strategic plans' influence on decision-making, Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) propose two dimensions: (1) local plan quality; (2) local planners' perception of plan implementation. The indicators are:

- The extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in the strategic plan;
- The extent to which the strategic plan contains a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and to improve commitment to plan goals;
- The extent to which the strategic plan includes provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies;
- The extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale);
- The extent to which the strategic plan is accessible to the wider public;
- The extent to which the strategic plan was perceived to be useful in supporting decision-making.

As an implementation-oriented (conformance-based) aspect of strategic plans, Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) look at dimensions that aim to describe the local context in which the plan operates. An indicator was based on this. This indicator is: the extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in the strategic plan.

² The difference between performance-based evaluation methods and conformance-based evaluation methods might require further explanation, as these are debated terms with no universal agreement. With regards to measuring usefulness, performance-based evaluation methods generally consider plans to be visions, and thus focus on measuring decision-making. Conformance-based evaluation methods generally consider plans to be blueprints, and thus focus on measuring the plan's actual implementation 'on the ground' (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019).

Although (strategic) local plans may have ‘blueprint elements’, they certainly also have ‘vision elements’, as often they are more closely related to visions. As such, there are also performance-based aspects to be measured (aimed decision-making or communication). However, with performance, Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) do explicitly not mean the plan’s conformance to (or consistency with) ‘plan-writing protocols’. For the plan quality of such plans, they instead “[...] *assess whether their design is accessible to the wider public and whether they entail a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and improve their commitment towards the goals of the plans [...]*” (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 882). Based on this, two indicators were developed. The first indicator is: the extent to which the strategic plan contains a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and to improve commitment to plan goals. The second indicator is: the extent to which the strategic plan is accessible to the wider public.

Another mentioned performance-based indicator, which indeed connects to decision-making aspects, is the extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions for coordination with other (strategic) plans or policies, or governmental actors of different jurisdictions (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019). An indicator was based on this. This indicator is: the extent to which the strategic plan includes provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies.

In their study, Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) mention another performance-based indicator, based on the perception of local planners. “[...] *are local plans successfully implemented according to the perception of local planners?*” (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 881). Although this indicator involves plan implementation, this is not a conformance-based indicator, because it does not directly measure the plan implementation itself. It looks at the perception of local planners, and thereby aims to investigate communication and decision-making. An indicator was based on this, but this indicator was further expanded in its scope to make it more tangible and relevant for measuring performance. As the indicator deals with the perception on the implementation, the indicator’s concept of ‘implementation’ has been supplemented with several (conformance-based) implementation elements that would normally apply to blueprint plans. “[...] *their evaluation generally implies using action-oriented dimensions to check whether the plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation [...], i.e. precisely describing who is in charge of implementing the policies and over what timescale.*” (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 882). Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) also looked if a plan describes the details of its long-term goals (as part of documenting its planning process), which was also added to the indicator. Ultimately, an indicator was developed, based on this. This indicator is: the extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale).

A core concept that is very central to Rudolf and Grădinaru’s (2019) study, is the influence of strategic plans on decision-making (and their usefulness for decision-making), as a central ‘performance’ element. Although they argue that performance- and conformance-based plan evaluation methods can coexist and also complement each other, they do not argue for further integration of both methods. They make this argument because in practice, the performance (decision-making) and conformance (implementation) of strategic plans often proved to be disconnected (or independent) from each other; at least more disconnected than plan evaluation

methods often assume³. It often happened that a strategic plan seemed to have had a high level of conformance (successful implementation), and this was wrongly attributed to a (presumed) high level of performance (successful decision-making). In other words, the successfulness of strategic plans (and their merits) are often measured by looking at the practical results 'on the ground' from the connected project plans (blueprints), and by looking at such projects' conformance with strategic goals, even though the strategic plan (and the decision-making) might have not substantially contributed to the project plans (blueprints). Still, many evaluation methods seem to wrongly assume a connection between strategic plans and project plans, in cases where there is none. To take into account the influence of strategic plans on operational decision-making, an indicator was developed, based on this. Instead of just measuring performance, this indicator might measure the concept 'influence', because Lyles et al. (2016) mention that the term 'influence' should be used when assessing whether or not a plan is used in practical decision-making (Lyles et al., 2016). The developed indicator is: the extent to which the strategic plan was perceived to be useful in supporting decision-making.

2.3 Conceptual model

For this research a conceptual model has been developed, which is included in Figure 2.6. It includes the three central research concepts from the theoretical framework, which are marked with an orange colour. For each central research concept, the associated dimensions from the operationalisation are included (which can be found in chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance*'). These dimensions are used for measuring the central research concepts in practice, and are marked with a yellow colour.

The use of the two dimensions of multi-level governance, namely the decentralisation of retail planning competencies and the quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors, is supported by research from Prud'homme (1995), and Hooghe and Marks (2001). Furthermore, the use of the two dimensions of municipal decision-making, namely leadership legitimacy and the inclusion of strategic plans into decision-making, is supported by research from Faludi (1989), Mastop and Faludi (1997), and Smith (1997). Finally, the use of the dimension of the quality of local plans is supported by research from Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019).

³ Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) based this assumption about the presumed practical independence of performance and conformance elements in plan implementation mostly on different casestudies that were carried out by Korthalt Altes (2006) and Feitelson et al. (2017), which both conclude that there is indeed not always a link between 'performance' and 'conformance' in spatial planning practice (Korthals Altes, 2006; Feitelson et al., 2017).

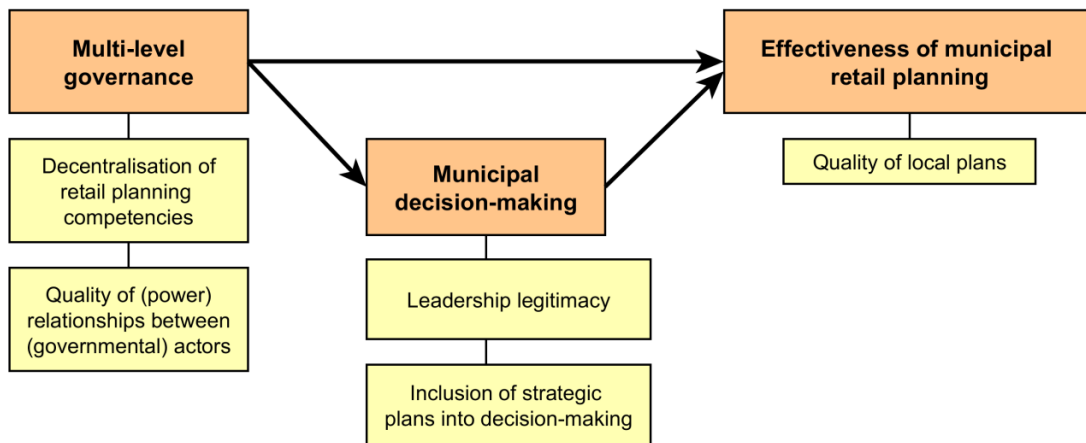


Figure 2.6: Conceptual model.

The conceptual model in Figure 2.6 also includes the assumed influences between the central research concepts. Based on van der Krabben's (2009) research on the effects of the decentralisation and changes in the governance system of retail planning, it is assumed that multi-level governance has an influence on the effectiveness of municipal retail planning. In addition to that, this assumption is also based on the case from Verduijn et al. (2015), which illustrates both the influence of networking (albeit through policy entrepreneurs) on governance systems, how decentralisation can lead to a different role distribution for actors, and especially how (legal or non-legal) interaction processes between different governance levels can influence spatial planning practice.

Based on the research by Ploegmakers and Beckers (2015) on urban regeneration initiatives, it is assumed that municipal decision-making has an influence on the effectiveness of municipal retail planning. Their research illustrates that political decision-making can influence plan effectiveness and implementation in spatial planning (Ploegmakers & Beckers, 2015).

Furthermore, based on the research by Ploegmakers et al. (2013) on the supply of serviced building land by municipalities, it is assumed that multi-level governance has an influence on municipal decision-making. Their research illustrates that a municipality's 'quest for control' can influence decision-making processes. In addition to that, this assumption is also based on Hodgson's (1997) theory, which illustrates that interactions between actors of different (governance) levels can influence decision-making processes (and the development of actors' abilities).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research strategy

For this research, the choice has been made to conduct a qualitative research, of an explanatory nature. The research is based on the assumption that multi-level governance possibly might have an influence on the effectiveness of municipal retail planning, and therefore it tries to explain in what ways this possible influence might work. A consequence of this choice is that such influences may not be statistically proven or refuted. Individual indicators or dimensions may be determined to be more or less relevant based on the results and their context (Creswell, 2007). There is no hypothesis that is assessed.

There are several different reasons for choosing to conduct a qualitative research. Qualitative research makes it possible to study the phenomenon in its natural environment, which is of additional value for getting a deeper understanding of the researched concepts. Because of the level of complexity, it would be difficult to simulate these same concepts with experiments in an artificial environment. Besides, the researched concepts have many indicators connected to them individually, which requires the research to have a high level of detail to suitably measure all concepts (Creswell, 2007). *“This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research.”* (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). As a consequence, this makes another reason for choosing qualitative research more relevant, namely the pursuit of a holistic account. With a holistic account, complex interactions may be taken better into account. Especially the power relationships between governmental actors should be studied in their most ‘natural state’, while limiting the influence of external factors as much as possible (Smith, 1997). The respondent’s perspective (or opinion) on the research problem is central in further understanding the research problem. From the theoretical framework and operationalisation it is concluded that the amount of studied concepts or processes is low, but the number of different factors within them is very high. This seems to make a qualitative research and a higher level of detail both more desirable. Through empirical research, the socially constructed reality that the different (governmental) actors perceive (the ‘new’ governance system in retail planning in the Netherlands), can be best investigated through understanding the different actors’ perspectives. This is different from quantitative research, which focuses (more) on the discovery of generally applicable laws (Creswell, 2007; Vennix, 2012).

Within this research, the research subject is: the effectiveness of municipalities’ retail planning. For the dependent variable, statements can mostly be made at the municipal level, although specific statements might also apply to the level of regional authorities and the provincial level. The research units are: municipalities. The observation units are (or the aggregation level is): representatives from these municipalities, regional authorities and the province. In addition to that, it incorporates the municipalities’ retail visions (Vennix, 2012).

The used research strategy is based on the constructivist research paradigm. Paradigms are coherent worldviews which hold certain basic assumptions about *“[...] the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts [...]”* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Paradigms cannot be proven or disproven, because they are not based on ‘provable’ facts. They are based on a set of assumptions about: (1) what the form and nature of reality is (ontology); (2) what the ultimate boundary is of how much an

observer can know about reality (epistemology); (3) the ways in which the observer can discover 'real' information about this presumed reality (methodology) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to constructivism, the form and nature of reality are all relative. Reality is based on social constructions, which can never be fully 'true'. Compared to each other, social constructions can only be more informed or less informed. Interactions between people (often named 'dialectical processes') generate knowledge, because interactions ultimately lead to consensus between people. Social constructions are indeed based on consensus between people. As a consequence, knowledge is considered to be relative, because new interactions can change perspectives, shared consensus and ultimately the social constructions. Applied to a research methodology, social constructions (which make up the perceived reality) can to a high degree be uncovered most successfully through interactions between an observer and a respondent.

For the form of this research, the choice was made for a comparative casestudy with two groups of cases. *"A casestudy is a research in which the researcher tries to get a profound and integral insight into one or a few objects or processes limited in time and space."* (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016, p. 179). There are different reasons for choosing a comparative casestudy. As mentioned before, the researched concepts have many indicators connected to them individually. Phrased differently, the amount of studied concepts or processes is low, while the number of different factors within them is very high. The presence of many factors (and indicators) that need to be taken into account asks for an in-depth method. Going in-depth with a (relatively) high amount of indicators, coupled with a (relatively) low amount of cases, is a core characteristic of casestudies (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016). Furthermore, the need for strategic sampling also makes a comparative casestudy a better option for conducting this research. Strategic sampling means that the selection of cases within the casestudy is based on a strategic selection, which will make the research less generalizable and thus lowers the external validity. The purpose of this strategic sampling is to make the conceptual design not the (only) directive in choosing the research units (cases), but to also give the information that the researcher seeks to acquire on the research units (cases) an important, decisive role in the selection of research units (cases) (Vennix, 2012; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016). The selected cases for the casestudy have to be geographically and administratively demarcated. Different types of information sources and data are used, such as interview data and content analysis data, which approaches a triangulation process. Especially for the independent variable (multi-level governance), theoretical replication is important. This theoretical replication means that already developed theories about the independent variable also provide arguments for choosing the different cases. This might capture the presumed 'variations' within the independent variable, and might make a successful comparison better achievable (Vennix, 2012). Presumed differences in the independent variable (multi-level governance), based on available information, ultimately played an important role in selecting the two groups of cases that were compared. This is further explained later on. Finally, it is mentioned that the scope of this research is limited, and thus not fully exhaustive. It is likely that there are other factors that have not been taken into account in the theoretical framework and operationalisation, but that still may have an influence. Used theories and indicators only aim to approach the researched concepts. To provide for as much theoretical reflection as possible, answers to the sub-questions are ultimately compared to the theoretical framework itself. This comparison is conducted in the comparative analysis (which can be found in chapter '6. Comparative analysis').

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Research material

The practical goal of the research is to measure the researched concepts in the way that they apply to the selected cases. Next to that, possible external influences from municipal decision-making are taken into account. The selected municipalities serve as the cases and research units. The observation units are representatives from these municipalities (and other included governmental actors), which also act as respondents. These respondents are considered to be representatives of the governmental actors where they are employed, within their particular policy field. For the content analysis, municipalities' retail visions are also considered to be observation units. With regards to the researched concepts, this research aims to achieve a better understanding of them, within the limits of what is possible while working with this theoretical framework, operationalisation, and within the administrative boundaries of the selected cases. The operationalisation in chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*' can not measure the researched concepts in their totality because: (1) the used theories sometimes contradict each other on specific components or factors; (2) some theories do (partly) overlap each other; (3) some theories provide better 'handles' for measuring certain aspects than other theories. Because of these reasons, the theoretical framework and operationalisation are a collection of different elements that were considered to be the most useful within the context of this particular research. For the selected cases, this research aims to look at all (relevant) governance layers that apply for the field of retail planning, in order to include all different perspectives, and in order to achieve a coherent, holistic view of the way in which the 'new' governance system is present in the selected cases. These governance layers include municipalities, regional authorities, and the province. Within these layers, commissions with specific tasks or legal responsibilities in the policy field are considered to be of special interest.

An overview was developed, which provides a framework on the data that needs to be collected in order to answer the main research question. This overview has been included as a table in Table A1.1, in Appendix 1, and summarises all used indicators. It is based on the operationalisation from chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*', and it includes the operationalisation of all research concepts into measurable indicators, along with their dimensions and original sources. The indicators that were later considered to be non-relevant (within the context of this research) have not been removed from Table A1.1. Instead, they were highlighted in italics.

3.2.2 Data collection

Respondent interviews

Each case in the comparative casestudy has one (or more) interviews connected to it, which provide the main body of the gathered information. These are in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are an important research method in qualitative research, because they are very useful in uncovering people's experiences, opinions, judgments, feelings or plans. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer develops a list of topics which are covered in the interview (Vennix, 2012). "*The interviewer determines the order in which the topics are discussed and the way in which the questions are formulated.*" (Vennix, 2012, p. 253). For these semi-structured

interviews, an interviewguide has been developed which contains a list of topics (dimensions) with possible interview questions for all indicators. During the semi-structured interviews the sequence, wording, and phrasing of topics and interview questions are determined by the interviewer. The developed interviewguide comes in two separate versions: one for respondents from municipalities, and one for respondents from other governmental actors (regional authorities and the province). Both interviewguides have a Dutch version too, which was the version that was ultimately used in practice because all interviews were conducted in the Dutch language. The English version is a direct translation of it, and serves as a reference for non-Dutch speakers. The interviewguide for municipalities is found in Appendix 3, which includes both the Dutch and the English versions. The interviewguide for regional authorities and the province is found in Appendix 4, which also includes both the Dutch and the English versions. All interviewguides are based directly on the operationalisation of the used theories (and the theoretical framework), which is found in chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*'.

Qualitative content analysis

For most indicators connected to the dependent variable, a method different from interviews is used. In order to study the effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning, the choice was made to analyse municipalities' retail visions. The reason for this choice was to increase construct validity, as is explained further on in chapter '3.3 *Research credibility*'. For analysing municipalities' retail visions, the method of a qualitative content analysis is used. According to Verschuren and Doorewaard (2016), a content analysis can be a valuable addition to interviews or observations, especially if documents relevant for the research are easily accessible. This analysis has to follow the same basic procedure as 'regular' interviews, meaning that it has to be built on the operationalisation of the central research concepts in chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*'. Therefore, the already formulated indicators should guide the search for relevant information within the policy documents.

"[...] this concerns a translation of the questions from the research question into concrete matters that one should observe when studying the contents of media and documents. This means that here, too, an operationalisation of the central concepts from the research question is necessary." (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016, p. 230).

For each of the six selected cases, the involved municipality's retail vision was collected and stored, in order to study it. As is explained further on, having a retail vision was a practical prerequisite for each case, in order to be able to study the dependent variable. For an overview of all (relevant) retail policies that apply to the selected cases, from different governance levels, a reference is made to chapter '4. *Selected cases*'. For the six selected cases (municipalities), the relevant collected municipal retail visions that have been used in the content analysis are mentioned directly below.

Municipalities' retail policies

Here follow the retail visions for the three cases in the first group, which include the municipalities with a presumed high level of multi-level governance:

- The municipality of Eindhoven developed its own retail vision in the year of 2015. This retail vision is named the Detailhandelsnota Gemeente Eindhoven (*Retail Regulation Municipality Eindhoven*) (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2015);
- The municipality of Boxtel also developed its own retail vision in the year of 2015. This retail vision is named the Beleidsnota detailhandel en horeca Boxtel (*Policy regulation retail and hospitality industry Boxtel*) (BRO, 2015d);
- The municipality of Waalre developed its own retail vision in the year of 2010. This retail vision is named Waalre, detailhandelsvisie (*Waalre, retail vision*) (BRO, 2010).

Here follow the retail visions for the three cases in the second group, which include the municipalities with a presumed low level of multi-level governance:

- The municipality of Tilburg is in the process of developing its own (new) retail vision in the current year of 2020. This retail vision is named Tilburg, Detailhandelsvisie 2019 (*Tilburg, Retail vision 2019*) (BRO, 2019);
- The municipality of Bergen op Zoom developed its own retail vision in the year of 2016. This retail vision is named the Detailhandelsstructuurvisie Bergen op Zoom (*Retail structure vision Bergen op Zoom*) (Droogh Trommelen en Partners, 2016);
- The municipality of Woensdrecht also developed its own retail vision in the year of 2016. This retail vision is named the Detailhandelsvisie 2016-2020 (*Retail vision 2016-2020*), and it is an elaboration of an earlier economic vision from 2014 (as an in-depth addition to it) (Hendrikx, 2016).

Case selection: the province

The choice was made to select the province of Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands, as a framework to subsequently select regional authorities and municipalities from. For the selection of this province there were several reasons. Because multi-level governance is concerned with the (local) involvement of different governance levels, the initiation of the province's project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*) in the province played an important role (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c; Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2019). Especially because the project focused on aspects of the vacant retail property problem (in different places), making city centres attractive, and stimulating entrepreneurship. It was of additional importance that the approach of the project had a dual nature, thereby focusing combining the knowledge of different actors, as well as on cooperation to find new creative solutions. This might be relevant, because the relationships between governmental actors (or different governance levels) are an important dimension of this research. Four different municipalities in the province participated in the province's project.

"In every practice, the same problem is central: the amount of vacant shops is increasing, as a result of which the attractiveness of the area is deteriorating and there is a poor future perspective. The participants in 'Samen Hart voor de Zaak' want to introduce innovation and come to an approach to these vacant properties. [...] And very important: municipalities, entrepreneurs and residents are actively involved in the search for solutions." (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c, p. 31).

The roles of the province in this project are clearly defined as: (1) managing the process; (2) organising knowledge-sharing, and stimulating knowledge development; (3) connecting different actors; (4) organising the meetings; (5) ensuring the deployment of experts; (6) establishing a shared action plan; (7) sharing the knowledge that is acquired from practice; (8) looking for customisation in the approach of the implementation (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c).

Another reason for selecting the province of Noord-Brabant, is the potential influence that the change of the governance system in 2004 may have had. There are large differences in the amount of former national restrictions that the different provinces took over then (Spierings, 2006; Krabben, 2009). It seems that no specific research has addressed the specific change in the governance system in the province of Noord-Brabant yet. It is not yet entirely clear to what extent the province of Noord-Brabant decentralised its responsibilities for retail planning to regional authorities or municipalities, although there are indications on this situation.

Another important reason for choosing the province of Noord-Brabant, is that it seems to be the case that this province is proactively involved in retail planning. It is mentioned that the province is responsible for the process and quality of the coordination of regional agreements, for which purpose it established an advisory commission: the Provinciale Retailadviescommissie (*Provincial Retail Advisory Commission*) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c). For studying the 'new' governance system, it is important to consider that this commission has been given the authority and responsibility to assess large-scale and 'peripheral' retail plans. It seems that the establishment of such a commission might be an indication of a decentralisation process of retail planning competencies going on, or that the 'new' governance system is in the process of being implemented (Krabben, 2009). The mentioned commission also advises on the retail plans that require regional coordination, and assesses them if necessary. The involved governmental actors commit themselves to this commission's advice and judgement. Therefore, there seems to be a degree of institutionalisation. Furthermore, the province of Noord-Brabant has developed a province-wide policy approach for its retail sector. This approach is detailed in the Brabantse Aanpak Leegstand (*Noord-Brabant's Approach to Vacant Properties*). It is a comprehensive approach, and, among other matters, it involves aforementioned provincial commission, the project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*), and different (collaborative) learning courses for sharing sectoral retail knowledge with (or between) municipalities and other actors (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c). A summary of Noord-Brabant's efforts in retail planning is also included in the provincial RetailDeals from 2016, which summarised how all provinces in the Netherlands intend to fulfil their new directing roles in retail planning. It also captures their proposals and efforts for this purpose (Interprovinciaal Overleg, 2016).

A final reason is that the province of Noord-Brabant seems to be active in monitoring its retail sector, and in publishing on that. Annually, the province presents a report on the 'facts and figures' of the province's retail sector (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018a; Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). These reports present information on the province's whole retail offer, the amount (and types) of vacant retail properties, and the plans for retail development. All information is displayed in multiple configurations, both for the retail areas, size-classifications of municipalities, and regional areas. In the regional spatial meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*), the province annually develops agreements with its municipalities for business park development and for 'programming' retail, although regionally established policies and agreements have a leading directive in this. In the province of Noord-Brabant, the

development of regional agreements is also secured by (provincial) regulations (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c).

Case selection: the regional authorities (regions and sub-regions)

The regional authorities have played an important role in the selection of cases (municipalities). In the first group, a selection of three municipalities with a presumed high level in multi-level governance was pursued. This level of multi-level governance might generally be indicated by the amount of governance levels that were involved in the retail planning of a single municipality (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). For the first group (which consist of municipalities with a presumed high level of multi-level governance), the choice was made to select these municipalities mostly from the region of Metropoolregio Eindhoven, and thereby also mostly from the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (as part of that region). Metropoolregio Eindhoven was selected because this is the only region in Noord-Brabant where all of its sub-regions have developed their own sub-regional retail visions. This might indicate Metropoolregio Eindhoven's involvement in the retail planning of its sub-regions, and might thus indicate a 'proactive component' of the governance layer of regional authorities in retail planning. There are also two reasons for choosing the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven. Even though all sub-regions have their own retail vision, one sub-region in particular (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven) seemed to have a higher level of involvement in retail planning than the other sub-regions. The first of these reasons is that Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven has its own sub-regional implementation agenda, connected to its sub-regional retail vision (which is mentioned in chapter '4. *Selected cases*'). The second reason is that Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven has its own authority for assessing retail plans and policies (and advising on them), also in the form of an assessment commission. This is the Regionale Adviescommissie Detailhandel (RACD) (*Regional Advisory Commission Retail*). The province of Noord-Brabant has given permission for this commission's establishment, and also bestowed authority on it in retail planning (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, 2019b). *"It has been agreed with the province that developments and plans on the territory of the nine municipalities within the urban area⁴ will only be tested by the RACD."* (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, 2019b, p. 1). So it seems that within this particular sub-region, a process of decentralisation has given sub-regional authorities additional responsibilities and competencies in the field of retail planning. Ultimately, this means that for selecting the three cases (municipalities) with a presumed high level of multi-level governance, a preference was given to the nine municipalities in Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (within the larger region of Metropoolregio Eindhoven).

In the second group, a selection of three municipalities with a presumed low level in multi-level governance was pursued. This level of multi-level governance might generally be indicated by a low amount (or relative absence) of governance levels that were involved in the retail planning of a single municipality (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). For the second group (which consist of municipalities with a presumed high level of multi-level governance), the choice was made to select these municipalities mostly from the region of West-Brabant. In the first stage, the region of Midden-Brabant also seemed suitable, because it had no administrative division into different sub-regions. However, it has a (relatively) small geographic size, as it is Noord-Brabant's smallest region. Administratively, its number of municipalities is even smaller than some sub-regions. This presents uncertainty if such a region might be managed or directed in the same way

⁴ Here the words 'urban area' refer to the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (*Urban Area Eindhoven*), as a translation of the sub-region's name.

as a sub-region of equal size. As scale levels of governance layers might be important, this (relatively) small geographic size might presents uncertainty on the presumed level of multi-level governance. Areas of a different types and sizes should be investigated differently in the investigation of their governance systems (Prud'homme, 1995). Ultimately, the region of West-Brabant was selected. Although the region has a regional retail vision (like all other regions of Noord-Brabant) and a regional implementation agenda, it consists of 17 municipalities, which makes its administrative scale level relatively large. Even though the region is officially divided into two different sub-regions, these two sub-regions both do not seem to be involved in retail planning or in developing their own retail policies. This might make this division into sub-regions less relevant in the context of this research, because authority distribution over different policy areas should always be taken into account when studying governance systems (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The regional retail vision does not mention any sub-regional retail vision, which seems to confirm that these do not exist at the moment (BRO, 2014). As West-Brabant's retail vision applies to 17 municipalities within the region, this might possibly indicate a low level of multi-level governance. The region's authority seems to be spread out over a high number of municipalities, while simultaneously there seems to be only one additional layer of governance active in the policy field of retail planning that applies to the municipalities, besides municipalities' own retail visions and the provincial guidelines and frameworks (within the context of this research). Ultimately, this means that for selecting the three cases (municipalities) with a presumed low level of multi-level governance, a preference was given to the 17 municipalities in West-Brabant.

Case selection: the municipalities

For the selection of cases (municipalities), it was ultimately pursued to select two groups of three municipalities, making a total of six municipalities. The first group of three municipalities is supposed to consist of three municipalities with a presumed high level in multi-level governance. These selected municipalities are Eindhoven, Boxtel, and Waalre. The second group of three municipalities is supposed to consist of three municipalities with a presumed low level in multi-level governance. These selected municipalities are Tilburg, Bergen op Zoom, and Woensdrecht. This principle has been successfully applied to the selection of cases for this research.

However, there were additional factors that were taken into account for the selection of cases. As mentioned before, it was considered a precondition that the selected municipalities actually had developed retail visions, for the practical reason of being able to analyse the dependent variable. Because there did not seem to be standardized naming criteria for municipalities' retail visions, no naming conditions were used. In practice, municipalities' retail visions may have different types of names, or may combine different thematic visions together into a comprehensive policy. Municipalities without a retail vision were excluded from both selections. Some municipalities that had a retail vision were excluded from the selection as well, if their retail visions: (1) only consisted of a general description of the current local retail circumstances; (2) only consisted of a 'purchase flow research' (a statistically aimed SWOT-analysis of the municipality's current retail structure); (3) did not contain any specific policy measures (but only broadly described end-goals); (4) focused essentially only on city centre redevelopment, without addressing or demarcating the issue of retail planning in any way. As mentioned before too, for the first and second group, there were preferences for the specific region and sub-region to select from. For the first group, the 9 municipalities in Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven were given a preference, while in the second group, the 17 municipalities in West-

Brabant were given a preference. Also, additional factors applied to the first group, as described earlier in the section on the province of Noord-Brabant: a special preference was given to municipalities that had participated in the province's project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*), as this might indicate a higher level of involvement in retail planning from a different governance layers (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c; Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2019).

Another relevant factor was that it was considered of additional value to capture geographic variations within each group's selection. In other words, within a group, the three municipalities should have varying geographic characteristics. This was based on Prud'homme's (1995) study, which mentioned that cities or villages of different geographic sizes and types should be researched differently, because differences in geographic factors might cause differences in their governance structures. *"Most discussions of decentralization [...] ignore geography. [...] large cities should be treated differently from smaller jurisdictions even if they have the same legal status because they are more able to benefit from decentralization."* (Prud'homme, 1995, p. 214). In order to nullify the potential influences of such factors in this research, and to prevent the situation that (possible) differences between the two groups are actually caused by a particular geographic characteristic or factor being shared within one group, measures were taken. The decision was made to select three municipalities per group, with each municipality having different characteristics in geographic size, population size, and spatial structure. The classification of municipalities that the province of Noord-Brabant uses was of additional use. This classification uses three classes: the four largest cities, the 10 middle-sized cities, and the 50 smaller municipalities (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b).

In both groups of cases, ultimately one case (municipality) was selected that did not entirely fit all selection criteria. In the first group, one case (municipality) outside of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (and also Metropoolregio Eindhoven) was selected, in order to acquire an additional case that had participated in the project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*): the municipality of Boxtel. This seemed to be the best solution, because beforehand the research already included two cases from Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, but still only one case that had participation experience in the project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*). Now it also includes two cases that have participated in this project. In the second group, one case (municipality) outside of West-Brabant was selected, mostly because of the aforementioned consideration to include three municipalities with different geographic characteristics and sizes (Prud'homme, 1995). Originally, the decision was made to include at least one large city in each of both groups. Approaching cases of the intended selection was not always successful, and therefore it was not possible to include a large city from West-Brabant in the research. Ultimately, the municipality of Tilburg in the region of Midden-Brabant was selected instead. This city seemed to have characteristics that were comparable to the large cities of West-Brabant.

In Figure 3.2, the main reasons for selecting the cases are summarised. Additional information on all cases, including their histories, local characteristics, economic characteristics, retail sectors, and their developments over time with regards to vacant retail properties, can be found in Appendix 5. An overview of all the relevant retail policies that apply to these selected cases, at different governance levels, can be found in chapter '4. Selected cases'.

Groups	Cases	Reasons for selection
First group (with a presumed high level of multi-level governance)	Municipality of Eindhoven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the four largest cities of Noord-Brabant; The municipality is located in the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, within the region of Metropoolregio Eindhoven (two possible additional governance layers); The municipality has developed its own retail vision.
	Municipality of Boxtel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the 50 smaller municipalities of Noord-Brabant (although it is a relatively large village). The developments in its retail sector and vacant retail properties seem to be very different from Waalre (see chapter '4. Selected cases'); The municipality has participated in the province's project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (which might indicate the possible influence of an additional governance layer); The municipality has developed its own retail vision.
	Municipality of Waalre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the 50 smaller municipalities of Noord-Brabant (although relatively small, and consisting of smaller villages). The developments in its retail sector and vacant retail properties seem to be very different from Boxtel (see chapter '4. Selected cases'); The municipality is located in the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, within the region of Metropoolregio Eindhoven (two possible additional governance layers); The municipality has participated in the province's project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (which might indicate the possible influence of an additional governance layer); The municipality has developed its own retail vision.
Second group (with a presumed low level of multi-level governance)	Municipality of Tilburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the four largest cities of Noord-Brabant; The lack of a division into sub-regions, and thereby the lack of sub-regional retail visions, made the region of Midden-Brabant the best contender for selecting a large city in the second group, despite the region's (relatively) small geographic size; The municipality has developed its own retail vision.
	Municipality of Bergen op Zoom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the 10 middle-sized cities of Noord-Brabant; The municipality is located in the region of West-Brabant (one possible 'spread out' governance layer without practical subdivisions in the policy field of retail planning); The municipality has developed its own retail vision.
	Municipality of Woensdrecht	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The municipality is one of the 50 smaller municipalities of Noord-Brabant (consisting of several smaller villages); The municipality is located in the region of West-Brabant (one possible 'spread out' governance layer without practical subdivisions in the policy field of retail planning); The municipality has developed its own retail vision.

Figure 3.2: Reasons for selecting the cases.

All six selected cases are municipalities in the Netherlands (within the province of Noord-Brabant). It might be important to explain the key characteristics of municipalities in the Netherlands. An overview of this information has been included in Appendix 2.

Respondent selection

For selecting the respondents, the choice was made to approach policy officers from the governmental actors. These were considered to be representatives for their governmental actor.

For municipalities, these were often policy officers from the department of spatial planning (although not all of them were). For municipalities, respondents from the department of spatial planning were preferred, as they might be able to better answer all interview questions in their policy field. In general, respondents that had knowledge of the governmental actor's retail visions and policies (which were specifically named), were also preferred. Next to that, respondents that had knowledge of the coordination processes in retail planning with other governmental actors (municipalities, regional authorities, and the province) were also preferred. All governmental actors were formally approached with an interview request, often by e-mail, and sometimes by phone. Ultimately there are 14 respondents, divided over 11 interviews. An overview of these interviews and respondents has been included in Figure 3.3. There all respondents are mentioned by their designated respondent number, in order to anonymize them. Based on their abstract and anonymous respondent number, the cases that they belong to are mentioned, next to the interview that they participated in. All personal names, professions, and job titles have been omitted from this table. The same applies to references that might possibly connect the respondent numbers to any personal information. This was done because confidentiality agreements and exclusive usage limits apply to this information. This information is considered to be of a private and potentially sensitive nature.

Interview	Type	Case	Respondents (numbered)
Interview 1	Municipality	Waalre	1
Interview 2	Municipality	Eindhoven	2
Interview 3	Municipality	Boxtel	3
Interview 3	Municipality	Boxtel	4
Interview 3	Municipality	Boxtel	5
Interview 4	Municipality	Tilburg	6
Interview 5	Municipality	Bergen op Zoom	7
Interview 5	Municipality	Bergen op Zoom	8
Interview 10	Municipality	Woensdrecht	9
Interview 7	Regional authority	Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven	10
Interview 8	Regional authority	Metropoolregio Eindhoven	11
Interview 11	Regional authority	West-Brabant	12
Interview 6	Province	Noord-Brabant	13
Interview 9	Province	Noord-Brabant	14

Figure 3.3: Overview of the respondents.

The interviews in this research may be considered to have an expert component sometimes, as for some indicators, it might apply that knowledge is also pursued.

“If the objective of the researcher is not so much information or data, but knowledge that can be used directly for answering the research questions, then, in addition to respondents, experts can be approached for a survey or interview [...]” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016, pp. 226-227).

However, interviews in this research are explicitly not expert interviews, even though the respondents often have a dual nature. Respondents are representatives for their own governmental actors (municipalities, regional authorities, and the province). But often, they are also experts in the policy field of retail planning. However, they should not be considered fully objective in this respect. For answering the research questions and interview questions, the respondents’ perspectives, experiences, judgements, and opinions are of the highest value. Additional knowledge on specific topics may be useful, but is not necessary. For clarification purposes, respondents may be asked ‘expert’ questions during the interviews sometimes to illustrate or clarify certain topics that their governmental actor has had to deal with. This might develop a more practical understanding of the case for the interviewer (researcher), which increases the quality of the interviews.

3.2.3 Data analysis

Interview analysis

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from governmental actors, who were often knowledgeable on the governmental actor’s retail policy. With these semi-structured interviews, this research has aimed to get an accurate perspective on the different levels of governance (and the ‘new’ governance system) which might influence the effectiveness of municipal retail planning. The interviews have been recorded using a digital recording device, resulting in a set of audio files, saved in the m4a-format. These m4a-files have been converted into WAV-files by using the software program Audacity, version 2.2.1. After that, these WAV-files were used to develop written transcripts from the dialogues, which were fully transcribed literally. The transcribing process was conducted in the software program of ATLAS.ti 7, version 7.5.10 (Campus License Lease).

Later on, the interview transcripts were also coded to better facilitate the analysis. This coding was also conducted in the software program ATLAS.ti 7, version 7.5.10 (Campus License Lease). Two methods of coding have been used in the analysis of the interviews: structural coding and open coding (Saldaña, 2009). Although the interviews were semi-structured, sample questions could often be practically used in the interviews very well after small initial modifications or adjustments. Because such interview questions were grouped around specific dimensions, structural coding was suitable for following the thematic patterns of the interviews. Saldaña (2009) indeed describes that structural coding may be used to organise data round specific research questions. Many interviews have a large (and diverse) amount of information that needs to be coded; large portions of dialogue are grouped around a single (or a few) interview questions, which makes categorisation necessary. The described ‘core method’ of

structural coding is using the interview data as a reflection of itself, and therefore to use the existing content from specific interviews to improve coding, and to categorise all other interviews. It is a method suited for labelling and indexing data into larger datasets, as this allows quick access to data that might be considered relevant. For coding interview transcripts, structural coding is very useful. Large sections of information can be designated or connected to specific themes, which might accelerate the research process.

Another coding method that has been used in addition to structural coding is open coding (also known as initial coding). This choice has been made because the (pre-existing) structural codes, which are based on the existing dimensions and indicators, have a small inherent weakness: they can only be connected to data that corresponds to their specifically designed focus. In other words, with structural coding the researcher searches the acquired data for answers to the research questions. But it is possible (and also quite likely), that respondents provide relevant information outside of the format of the existing semi-structured interview questions too. For this purpose, during and after the structural coding process, initial coding has been used as a 'next round' of coding, in order to develop and attribute codes 'based on the data'. These codes were attributed to transcript parts that were considered to be relevant for the research, but that could not initially be connected to existing structural codes. This coding method is inherently based on readings that the data itself provides (Saldaña, 2009). Open coding was considered to be important, in order to account for possible influences on the research concepts that 'arise from the collected data', and which might have not been addressed earlier by the used theories, indicators and interviewguides.

3.3 Research credibility

3.3.1 Reliability

The reliability of a research focuses on the replicability of the research's procedure, and its goal is to reduce errors and biases (Yin, 2018). *"The objective is to be sure that, if a later researcher follows the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher and conducts the same study over again, the later investigator will arrive at the same findings and conclusions."* (Yin, 2018, p. 93). Reliable measurements should be independent from the observer and the method of observation (Vennix, 2012). In qualitative research and in casestudies reliability has to be taken into account, and this has implications for the research itself.

For casestudies, it is considered that reliability means studying the same cases again; not applying the used framework to a different case. However, for casestudies it is also true that often studying the exact same case, under the exact same circumstances, might not be possible (Yin, 2018). Sectoral developments and new policy developments (at different governance levels) constantly change the circumstances. To counter this, and to further increase the reliability and clarity, it is important for casestudies to document all followed procedures, which is the foundation for replicability. In this research, in this same chapter (chapter '3. Methodology'), all procedures and choices are therefore documented extensively. All the different aspects of the methodology are detailed, including how they are conducted in practice. The interviewguides are included as well in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4. In the earlier chapter '2. Theory', it is also clearly explained which theories are used, how they fit in the theoretical framework, and how they were operationalised.

From the operationalisation's perspective in chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*', an important way to increase the reliability is to investigate to what extent the variables, indicators, or interview questions about a specific theme are coherent. In general, the research's reliability can be increased by removing 'bad' items that are not coherent with other items. If these items show no correlation with the other items, they might be considered to not measure the theoretical construct (Vennix, 2012). This has been applied to this research, as indicators that proved not to be relevant for measuring the theoretical constructs were indeed removed. The non-relevance of such predefined indicators was discovered during the analysis of the interviews and during the content analysis of the retail visions. Such indicators did indeed not contribute to measuring the particular dimension that they were designed for (within the context of this particular research). In chapter '5. *Results*', these indicators are still mentioned for each dimension, but it is explicitly made clear that they are non-relevant. In an accompanying explanation it is explained why they were perceived to be non-relevant. For answering the sub-questions and the main research question they were no longer taken into account.

3.3.2 Validity

Construct validity

Construct validity is concerned with the relationship between the theories and the operationalisation. More specifically, construct validity is an indication of the extent to which the developed indicators (in the operationalisation) accurately measure the theoretical concepts (Yin, 2018). It is concerned with the question: is the measuring instrument correctly adjusted to measure it? In order to achieve construct validity, the subjects that are researched (often large processes or developments) should be translated into very specific theoretical concepts. Next to that, the indicators themselves should be supported by earlier theories or studies, that have used (or reviewed) these same indicators too for measuring these same theoretical concepts. In this research, both conditions are addressed to a certain extent. The research problem in the introduction was translated into theoretical concepts very elaborately in chapter '2. *Theory*'. Next to that, the operationalisation was established mostly by using theories and studies that were specifically developed for measuring the studied concepts, or parts of these concepts (such as the decentralisation processes). Other indicators were also extracted from earlier research that had been conducted on these same research concepts, and thus these indicators have the experience of being tested and used in practice. For further explanations on the theories and studies that were used to develop the indicators, a reference is made to chapter '2.2 *Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*'. More 'general' theories on the researched concepts have also been used for developing some indicators, but only for a minority of them. Furthermore, it was intended to reduce the subjectivity in the assessment of municipalities' retail visions (for the dependent variable) as much as possible, by measuring the connected indicators through a qualitative content analysis instead of through respondent interviews. Where possible, the qualitative content analysis was supported by respondent interviews.

Internal validity

Internal validity mostly applies when causal relationships are assumed between theoretical concepts. Internal validity deals with the extent to which it can be 'proven' that a causal

relationship between different theoretical concepts exists, in relation to the extent to which it can be 'ruled out' that no other factors actually caused (or influenced) this causal relationship (Yin, 2018). However, this research is an exploratory casestudy, and not an explanatory research. "[...] *internal validity is mainly a concern for explanatory case studies, when an investigator is trying to explain how and why event x led to event y.*" (Yin, 2018, p. 91). This research does indeed explore relationships between theoretical concepts, but it does not look at causality. It also does not assume causal relationships between the theoretical concepts. However, the level of internal validity that is associated with exploratory casestudies has an impact on the conclusions that can be drawn from the research. The conclusions do not (and can not) 'prove' causal relationships.

External validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which results from this research are generalizable to other situations. This is often indicated by the research questions that are asked in the casestudy (Yin, 2018). "*The form of the question(s) can help or hinder the preference for seeking generalizations—that is, striving for external validity.*" (Yin, 2018, p. 92). As mentioned by Yin (2018), this research does indeed ask 'how' questions, and not 'why' questions, as it concerns an exploratory research. The main research question and its sub-questions look at (and explore) the ways in which multi-level governance might have an influence on the effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning. The aim is not to discover why such an influence might exist, or to 'prove' that such an influence exists. The research aims to uncover the possible existence of such influences, if there are any. Future research might aim to 'prove' these explorations and the conclusions from this research. The chosen research strategy and research form have an impact on the external validity. As this concerns qualitative research, the aim is to get a holistic account of the problem that is studied. The research investigates concepts in their 'natural state'. The amount of studied concepts is low, and the level of depth is high, while cases are studied in-depth (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the research analyses a 'socially constructed reality', namely the 'new' governance system (Vennix, 2012). The cases themselves were chosen strategically, based on characteristics that made them the most relevant for studying differences in the independent variable (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2016). These decisions all lower the overall generalizability, because these decisions all further customise the research to studying this very specific situation, combined with these specific cases. This is considered to be acceptable because the aim of this research is not to develop generally applicable laws, statements or conclusions; instead it aims to examine the selected cases and their context in-depth. The conclusions can only be assumed to apply to the selected cases and the context in which they were studied. Conclusions may potentially be applicable in a wider perspective, or might apply to similar cases, but that is beyond the scope of this research.

4. Selected cases

This chapter details the six selected cases (municipalities) of this research. For each municipality that was selected, this chapter elaborates information on the relevant retail policies that apply to it (at different governance levels). More detailed information on each municipality's history, local characteristics, economic characteristics, and local retail sector has been included in Appendix 5. Additional information on the amount of vacant retail properties for each municipality, and their development over time, has been included in Table A6.1 in Appendix 6.

4.1 Case overview

A map has been developed to provide an overview of the six selected cases. This map is included in Figure 4.1. It is based on a map of the whole province of Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands, and all of its municipalities. The three selected cases (municipalities) of the first group, which are presumed to have a high level of multi-level governance, are marked with a blue colour, and are numbered 1 to 3. This concerns Eindhoven, Boxtel and Waalre. The three selected cases (municipalities) of the second group, which are presumed to have a low level of multi-level governance, are marked with an orange colour, and are numbered 4 to 6. This concerns Tilburg, Bergen op Zoom and Woensdrecht.

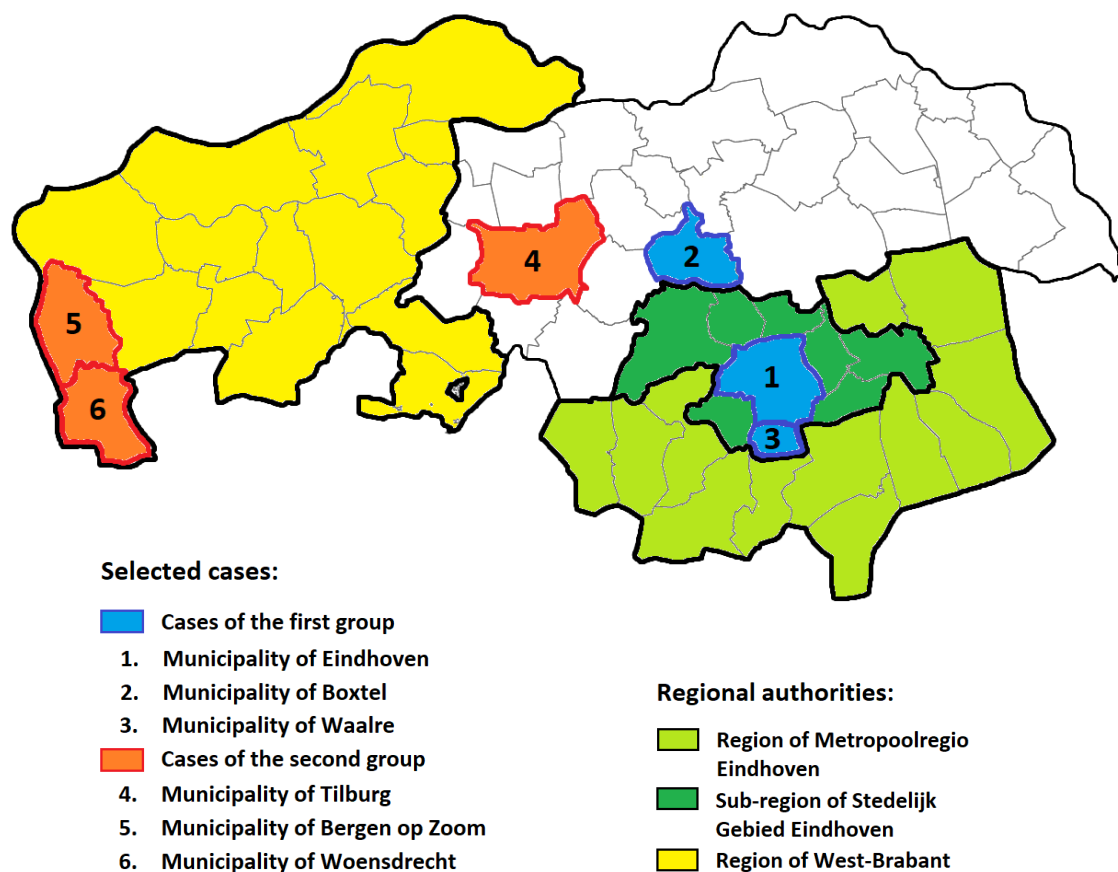


Figure 4.1: Overview of the selected cases (municipalities) in the province of Noord-Brabant. Based on a map by the province of Noord-Brabant (2020). Edited by Maxim Reinders (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2020).

4.2 Municipalities with a (presumed) high level in multi-level governance

4.2.1 Municipality of Eindhoven

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Eindhoven developed its own retail vision in the year of 2015. This retail vision is elaborated, and further details the municipality's citywide retail policy. It is named the Detailhandelsnota Gemeente Eindhoven (*Retail Regulation Municipality Eindhoven*) (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2015). Like the municipality of Waalre, the municipality of Eindhoven is part of the sub-region Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (*Urban Area Eindhoven*), which is an administrative collaboration that consists of nine municipalities (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, 2019a). This sub-region established detailed and extensive sub-regional retail policies in 2015, tailored to the dynamism of the sub-region. Their retail vision is named Detailhandelsvisie Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (*Retail Vision Urban Area Eindhoven*) (BRO, 2015a). This retail vision of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven is accompanied by an implementation strategy, named the Voorstel regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel (*Proposition regional implementation agenda retail*) (BRO, 2015b). The municipality of Eindhoven is also part of a larger region, which consists of 21 different municipalities, and incorporates 4 different sub-regions (including Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven). This region is named Metropoolregio Eindhoven (*Metropolitan Region Eindhoven*) (Metropoolregio Eindhoven, 2019). This region also has developed a detailed regional retail vision in 2015, which is shared by all municipalities. This retail vision is named the Regionale detailhandelsvisie (*Regional retail vision*) (Metropoolregio Eindhoven, 2015). An overview of all retail policies that apply to the municipality of Eindhoven (with the exception of 'general' provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.2.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Detailhandelsnota Gemeente Eindhoven	<i>Retail Regulation Municipality Eindhoven</i>	2015
Sub-region	Detailhandelsvisie Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven; Voorstel regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel	<i>Retail Vision Urban Area Eindhoven; Proposition regional⁵ implementation agenda retail</i>	2015; 2015
Region	Regionale detailhandelsvisie	<i>Regional retail vision</i>	2015

Figure 4.2: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Eindhoven.

4.2.2 Municipality of Boxtel

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Boxtel developed its own retail vision in the year of 2015. This retail vision is elaborated, and further details the municipality's retail policy. It is named Beleidsnota detailhandel en horeca Boxtel (*Policy regulation retail and hospitality industry Boxtel*) (BRO, 2015d). The municipality of Boxtel is part of the larger region Noordoost-Brabant (*Northeast*

⁵ The naming convention used here is 'regional', although the mentioned policy is indeed a sub-regional policy (and not a regional policy). For many sub-regions in the Netherlands, the naming convention of 'region' is used as well sometimes for their policies, instead of the more appropriate term 'sub-region'.

Brabant), alternatively named AgriFood Capital. AgriFood Capital is an administrative collaboration that consists of 17 municipalities, and incorporates 2 sub-regions. The particular sub-region in which the municipality of Boxtel is located has not developed retail policies. AgriFood Capital is a broad (regional) organisation, incorporating water authorities, farmers' organisations, hospitals, banks, knowledge institutions and food companies in its board of directors. The region is legally shaped as a 'public foundation', but there is a private company connected to it for policy implementation (AgriFood Capital, 2019). AgriFood Capital established a detailed and extensive regional retail policy in 2015. Their retail vision is named Regionale detailhandelsvisie (*Regional retail vision*) (BRO, 2015c). In 2016, the province of Noord-Brabant conducted an experimental project in Boxtel (one of the municipality's three villages). In this project, the province initiated a new collaboration initiative between the province, municipality, entrepreneurs, local inhabitants, knowledge institutions, and real estate owners of retail properties. This was named Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c; Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2019). Its main goals were to research the revitalisation of village (and city) centres, and to address the problem of vacant retail properties. An overview of all retail policies that apply to the municipality of Boxtel (with the exception of 'general' provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.3.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Beleidsnota detailhandel en horeca Boxtel	<i>Policy regulation retail and hospitality industry Boxtel</i>	2015
Region	Regionale detailhandelsvisie	<i>Regional retail vision</i>	2015
Province	Samen Hart voor de Zaak	<i>Heart for the Business Together</i>	2016

Figure 4.3: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Boxtel.

4.2.3 Municipality of Waalre

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Waalre developed its own retail vision in the year of 2010. This retail vision is elaborated, and further details the municipality's retail policy. It is named Waalre, detailhandelsvisie (*Waalre, retail vision*) (BRO, 2010). Like the municipality of Eindhoven, the municipality of Waalre is part of the sub-region Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (*Urban Area Eindhoven*), which is an administrative collaboration that consists of nine municipalities (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, 2019a). This sub-region established detailed and extensive sub-regional retail policies in 2015, tailored to the dynamism of the sub-region. Their retail vision is named Detailhandelsvisie Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (*Retail vision Urban Area Eindhoven*) (BRO, 2015a). This retail vision of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven is accompanied by an implementation strategy, named the Voorstel regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel (*Proposition regional implementation agenda retail*) (BRO, 2015b). The municipality is also part of a larger region, which consists of 21 different municipalities, and incorporates 4 different sub-regions (including Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven), named Metropoolregio Eindhoven (*Metropolitan Region Eindhoven*) (Metropoolregio Eindhoven, 2019). This region also has developed a regional retail vision in 2015, which is shared by all municipalities. This is named the Regionale detailhandelsvisie (*Regional*

retail vision) (Metropoolregio Eindhoven, 2015). In 2016, the province of Noord-Brabant conducted an experimental project in Aalst (one of the municipality's two villages). In this project, the province initiated a new collaboration initiative between the province, municipality, entrepreneurs, local inhabitants, knowledge institutions, and real estate owners of retail properties. This was named *Samen Hart voor de Zaak* (*Heart for the Business Together*) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018c; Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2019). Its main goals were to research the revitalisation of village (and city) centres, and to address the problem of vacant retail properties. An overview of all retail policies that apply to the municipality of Waalre (with the exception of 'general' provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.4.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Waalre, detailhandelsvisie	<i>Waalre, retail vision</i>	2010
Sub-region	Detailhandelsvisie Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven; Voorstel regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel	<i>Retail vision Urban Area Eindhoven; Proposition regional⁶ implementation agenda retail</i>	2015; 2015
Region	Regionale detailhandelsvisie	<i>Regional retail vision</i>	2015
Province	Samen Hart voor de Zaak	<i>Heart for the Business Together</i>	2016

Figure 4.4: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Waalre.

4.3 Municipalities with a (presumed) low level in multi-level governance

4.3.1 Municipality of Tilburg

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Tilburg established an earlier retail vision in the year of 2013, which was accepted by the city council. In 2020, their new (citywide) retail vision is in the process of being actualised, expanded, and further developed. This new (concept) retail vision seems to be elaborate, and further details the municipality's retail policy. It is named Tilburg, Detailhandelsvisie 2019 (*Tilburg, Retail vision 2019*) (BRO, 2019). The municipality of Tilburg is part of the region Hart van Brabant (*Heart of Brabant*), alternatively named Midden-Brabant (*Middle-Brabant*). Hart van Brabant is an administrative collaboration that consists of nine municipalities. It has meetings of (municipal) portfolio holders, a program bureau for daily management, and a network structure for (policy) implementation purposes (Regio Hart van Brabant, 2020). It is "[...] a public law agreement between certain administrative bodies of different municipalities, whereby it is determined that certain tasks and responsibilities are performed centrally. The mayors of the municipalities form its general board." (Regio Hart van Brabant, 2020, p. 1). This region has developed a detailed regional retail policy in 2017, shared by all municipalities, which mainly aims to create an overview of the current regional retail landscape. This retail vision is named Regionale detailhandelsfoto Hart van Brabant 2017 (*Regional retail picture Heart of Brabant 2017*) (BRO, 2017). An overview of all retail policies that apply to the

⁶ The naming convention used here is 'regional', although the mentioned policy is indeed a sub-regional policy (and not a regional policy). For many sub-regions in the Netherlands, the naming convention of 'region' is used as well sometimes for their policies, instead of the more appropriate term 'sub-region'.

municipality of Tilburg (with the exception of ‘general’ provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.5.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Tilburg, Detailhandelsvisie 2019	<i>Tilburg, Retail vision 2019</i>	2019
Region	Regionale detailhandelsfoto Hart van Brabant 2017	<i>Regional retail picture Heart of Brabant 2017</i>	2017

Figure 4.5: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Tilburg.

4.3.2 Municipality of Bergen op Zoom

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Bergen op Zoom developed its own retail vision in the year of 2016. This retail vision is elaborated, and further details the municipality’s retail policy. It is named Detailhandelsstructuurvisie Bergen op Zoom (*Retail structure vision Bergen op Zoom*) (Droogh Trommelen en Partners, 2016). Like the municipality of Woensdrecht, the municipality of Bergen op Zoom is part of the region West-Brabant, which is an administrative collaboration that consists of 17 municipalities, of which 16 are located in the province of West-Brabant (and a single municipality in the province of Zeeland). West-Brabant incorporates two sub-regions, but both do not seem to have their own retail policies (Regio West-Brabant, 2020). West-Brabant developed a regional retail policy in 2014, which is shared by all municipalities. This is named the Detailhandelsvisie West-Brabant 2014-2020 (*Retail vision West-Brabant 2014-2020*) (BRO, 2014). In 2015, this was followed by an accompanying shorter implementation strategy, which was named the Regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel West-Brabant (*Regional implementation agenda retail West-Brabant*) (Stec Groep, 2015). An overview of all retail policies that apply to the municipality of Bergen op Zoom (with the exception of ‘general’ provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.6.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Detailhandelsstructuurvisie Bergen op Zoom	<i>Retail structure vision Bergen op Zoom</i>	2016
Region	Detailhandelsvisie West-Brabant 2014-2020; Regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel West-Brabant	<i>Retail vision West-Brabant 2014-2020; Regional implementation agenda retail West-Brabant</i>	2014; 2015

Figure 4.6: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Bergen op Zoom.

4.3.3 Municipality of Woensdrecht

Relevant retail policies

The municipality of Woensdrecht developed its own retail vision in the year of 2016. This retail vision is elaborated, and further details the municipality’s retail policy. It is named Detailhandelsvisie 2016-2020 (*Retail vision 2016-2020*), and it is an elaboration of an earlier economic vision in 2014 (and an in-depth addition to it) (Hendrikx, 2016). Like the municipality of

Bergen op Zoom, the municipality of Woensdrecht is part of the region West-Brabant, which is an administrative collaboration that consists of 17 municipalities, of which 16 are located in the province of West-Brabant (and a single municipality in the province of Zeeland). West-Brabant incorporates two sub-regions, but both do not seem to have their own retail policies (Regio West-Brabant, 2020). West-Brabant developed a regional retail policy in 2014, which is shared by all municipalities. This is named the Detailhandelsvisie West-Brabant 2014-2020 (*Retail vision West-Brabant 2014-2020*) (BRO, 2014). In 2015, this was followed by an accompanying shorter implementation strategy, which was named the Regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel West-Brabant (*Regional implementation agenda retail West-Brabant*) (Stec Groep, 2015). An overview of all retail policies that apply to the municipality of Woensdrecht (with the exception of 'general' provincial policies or guidelines that apply equally to all municipalities in Noord-Brabant), is provided in Figure 4.7.

Administrative level	Policy (in Dutch)	English translation	Year
Municipality	Detailhandelsvisie 2016-2020	<i>Retail vision 2016-2020</i>	2016
Region	Detailhandelsvisie West-Brabant 2014-2020; Regionale uitvoeringsagenda detailhandel West-Brabant	<i>Retail vision West-Brabant 2014-2020; Regional implementation agenda retail West-Brabant</i>	2014; 2015

Figure 4.7: Retail policies that apply to the municipality of Woensdrecht.

5. Results

In this chapter the results of this research are presented. The research has been conducted following the methodology from chapter '3. *Methodology*', and has been conducted on the selected cases from chapter '4. *Selected cases*'. This approach has produced the results that are presented in this chapter. Within this chapter the results have been divided into four dimensions. These are the same four dimensions that are addressed by the sub-questions of this research (which can be found in chapter '1.3 *Research question*'). For each dimension, all connected indicators are elaborated. The used dimensions are:

- Decentralisation of retail planning competencies;
- Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors;
- Municipal decision-making;
- Quality and implementation of local plans.

5.1 Decentralisation of retail planning competencies

The convincingness of an actor's argument for its involvement in the development of strategic plans in retail planning

For all municipalities preservation was an important reason, and for the first group even their main reason. This concerned either preservation of fine-grained Dutch village structures, city structures, shopping centres, or city (or village) cores. Another important shared reason was protecting the existing (hierarchical) retail structures against negative market influences. For both groups, the distribution of services at the right places (and fulfilling inhabitants' needs) was a motivation for protection. For the first group, the possible loss of social cohesion was an additional motivation for protection. Although for both groups providing clarity and concentrating retail areas are mentioned, there are differences. The first group put an emphasis on providing clarity in communication towards inhabitants and market actors, for reaching a maximum liveability. The second group put a strong emphasis on the concentration of retail in city and village centres to prevent retail at undesired locations, and on reducing planning overcapacity in retail. Although both groups differ on this, the first group's main reason is preservation, while the second group's main reason is concentration. For the (sub)regions, there was also a difference. In the first group, the sub-region has much reasons, including protection against market influences (by large-scale developments or industry blurring), and maintaining centre attractiveness, liveability, service levels, and community life. The sub-region and region both bring municipalities together. In the second group, the region's reason for involvement mainly was to coordinate above-local retail plans, next to strengthening the economic business climate. For the province, the main reason for involvement is monitoring developments, communicating these developments towards municipalities, warning the municipalities, and to provide the municipalities with adequate knowledge for more informed (and conscious) decision-making, considerations, and trade-offs. The province also wants to stimulate the development of regional agreements. The province initiated a provincial commission for the assessment of retail plans, for the reason of being better able to assess retail plans on matters of size, quality, and innovation. The project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*) was initiated for the reasons: (1) to provide a follow-up on municipalities' motivations to act; (2) to bring municipalities'

ideas together; (3) to make municipalities think about repurposing former retail areas; (4) to develop knowledge that benefits all municipalities.

The number of (governmental) actors from different jurisdictions having an influence on retail planning in the municipality

There are differences in the experienced influences. The first group experienced influences by the sub-region, most notably in providing the framework for acting, and in holding back developments that were in conflict with agreements. Through negotiation within the sub-region, municipalities have an influence on each other. For the sub-region, this is confirmed. The sub-region is asked in evaluating retail policies, but also for advice on developing new policies (in different fields too). The sub-region (and its retail plan assessment commission) provide unsolicited advice to municipalities, as they monitor developments (like disappearances of retail formulas), and often warn municipalities with regards to (yet-unchanged) zoning plans, as well as the impact of large-scale developments. The sub-region conducts independent research into specific retail sub-sectors, draws future scenarios, and informs municipalities on them. They actively ask municipalities what they can help them with. The region's retail-themed learning course may have had an influence on civil servants and administrators from municipalities. In the second group, the region developed policies to concentrate retail areas, and gathers information on developments. There are regional agreements for large-scale retail plans, which have an influence. But the region's influence seems to be rather limited. The influence that municipalities have on each other by coordination is quite small. For the region's perspective, the municipalities' statements are confirmed. The region's influence is limited, and mostly concerns large-scale retail plans. The intensity of retail coordination meetings is low, as coordination only happens when it is necessary. However, objections during such meetings could have an influence. The first group experienced an influence by the sub-region's commission for the assessment of retail plans. This commission has an influence on retail plans and policies, because it assesses large-scale retail plans, and provides unsolicited 'non-hard' advice to municipalities. This influence is confirmed for the sub-region. The commission indeed assesses large-scale retail plans, and determines the conditions under which they are allowed. They are indeed also involved in the provision of unsolicited advice to municipalities. For both groups, the province has legal authority, and can hold back undesired developments. In the first group, it is experienced that the province provides the framework that municipalities have to connect to with their own retail visions. In the second group, it is experienced that municipalities have the obligation (set by the province) to coordinate retail plans regionally, which applies especially to large-scale retail plans. These need to be discussed with the province. For the province, this is not entirely confirmed. The province will not decide whether a retail plan is allowed or not, and will generally not intervene, except when there are direct provincial interests (such as non-adherence to regional agreements). The province monitors developments, informs municipalities, and draws municipalities' attention to issues, which (ultimately) influences decision-making. The province often also play a role in preventing negative developments (which is a role that seems difficult to demarcate because of the prevention itself). In the first group, for the sub-region, the province had a direct influence: (1) the province gave permission for the establishment of the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission; (2) the province has a seat in this commission's retail plan assessment process; (3) the (involved) provincial administrator is often present at the sub-region's meetings of (municipal)

portfolio holders and civil servants. The larger region is no longer involved in retail coordination, as the sub-regions took over this task. In the second group, the province also has an (indirect) influence on retail planning through actions, initiatives, and investigating which steps to take. In the first group, and for the province, it was experienced that the project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak* (*Heart for the Business Together*) had an influence. In the first group, it was experienced that the province became more involved because of it, thereby wanting to prevent vacant retail properties and competition. For the province, the project was experienced to have raised awareness on decision-making processes, administrative cultures, and the impact of both the decision-making processes and administrative cultures on retail policies. It may have provided clarity on current situations for municipalities. The province's retail plan assessment commission also has an influence. This commission often assesses retail plans, and investigates and 'shatters myths'⁷ on retail plans. The commission provides unsolicited advice, which is often focused on concentrating retail areas and on stimulating municipalities to remain active in coordinating and steering retail developments. This results in changed zoning plans sometimes, and also has influence on specific local developments. The commission often had to advise on large-scale retail plans to 'not be pursued' for their negative impacts on city (or village) centres, which had an influence on decisions in practice.

Free code: the hierarchical position of places within the region

There are differences in the hierarchical positions within the region. Both groups are aware of their municipalities' (hierarchical) positions within their (sub)region. In the first group, an emphasis is put on the self-knowledge of municipalities to know their (regional) position and functions, and the additional value this has. Being realistic in goals, functions, and providing clarity on these functions to consumers helps consumers to fulfil their needs more effectively. In descending order, the first group seems to consist of: (1) a city-municipality with a central role in the region, with a regional impact and specialised (luxury) retail functions; (2) a village-municipality; (3) a small-sized village-municipality, with a very local retail function, and no aspirations for very large retail structure expansions. The villages are aware of the city's central role and large impact, and are satisfied with their own position. There is mutual understanding that the region's villages need the city for proximity, while the city needs commercial support from the villages' inhabitants. In descending order, the second group seems to consist of: (1) a city with regional retail functions, and half of the region's retail supply, but still a very local catchment area; (2) a mid-sized city with regional retail functions, but a limited inflow. Recreational shopping functions are limited, and there is an overcapacity in the retail offer; (3) a small-sized municipality including five different village cores, with local retail functions and a dependence on larger municipalities nearby (for other retail functions). Here the provision of services to inhabitants is crucial in maintaining the village centre functions and retail structure. In the second group, the mid-sized city has a designated 'peripheral' retail location within its municipal boundaries, which seems to cause friction with the city centre occasionally. In the first group, for the sub-region, aforementioned positions are confirmed. There is also a (sub-regionally) designated location for large-scale retail developments. These large-scale retail developments are not allowed to settle in small municipalities, in order to prevent unnecessary competition. The coherence among

⁷ This concerns retail plans which are presented in such a way that they are considered 'too good to be true'.

municipalities in the sub-region is bigger than in the larger region, as there is increased dynamism within the sub-region (in the sense of these municipalities encountering more requests for large-scale retail plans).

The experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external (governmental) actors

There are differences in the experienced balance in the actor's control over policy content. In the first group, municipalities are independent in developing their own policies, and are not involved in the retail policies of other municipalities. In the second group, municipalities are also not involved in the retail plans of other municipalities, but mostly because these municipalities were concerned with downsizing their retail structures. However, there are differences in the distribution of control with regards to the regional authorities. In both groups, regional coordination is obligatory in the case of large-scale retail plans. In the first group, adherence to sub-regional agreements on large-scale retail plans is equally important as coordination; these agreements are decisive for the local possibilities that municipalities have. Non-adherence could lead to legal conflicts with other (governmental) actors. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission has the obligation to assess large-scale retail plans. Also, in the first group, one policy is maintained that has a major influence on determining the final establishment location of large-scale retail plans (if they are allowed), which is the 'one counter' policy⁸. This policy is aimed to decrease the impact of competitive negotiating by market actors with different municipalities simultaneously, to 'get the best deal'. In the second group, it is expected of municipalities to adhere to regional agreements on large-scale retail plans, and it is also expected of them to consult the region and province in the case of such large-scale retail plans. If no agreement can be reached regionally, the province might assess the large-scale retail plan. There are also differences in the distribution of control with regards to the province. In the first group, the province does not directly intervene in local retail projects. Translation of regional agreements to local retail policies is the responsibility of municipalities. The province can intervene by holding back retail plans, but this is very unlikely for them to do. If the retail plans contradict made (regional) agreements, the province will not cooperate with the retail plan, and withhold its support. However, if the retail plan deviates from provincial policies, it is mentioned that municipalities have to have very good reasons. In the second group, the province guards regional coordination. In the case of not coordinating, or not considering impacts on other municipalities,

⁸ In the past, market actors with a new large-scale retail development in mind often approached different municipalities at the same time, and simultaneously negotiated with these multiple municipalities in order to 'get the best deal', or the best outcomes for their locational preference and (local) conditions. This sometimes caused competition between municipalities to offer a 'better deal' than other municipalities (at each others' expense), in order to attract a particular market actor. It is mentioned that sometimes this behaviour may have pushed municipalities to the limits of what existing regional agreements allowed. The 'one counter' policy aims to prevent this competition, and seems work the following way: within a region, it obligates all municipalities to forward all requests for large-scale retail developments (above a certain size) to the regional authority, which establishes a specialised 'counter' for handling and assessing these requests. Through regional coordination, the location (in one of the municipalities) and conditions for the retail plan are determined. Municipal coordination still happens, but 'behind the counter'. The end result is presented at the 'counter'. The market actor can effectively no longer influence individual municipalities by presenting a 'competitive deal' that it may have received from another municipality (within the same region), because municipalities within the region no longer negotiate individually in such cases.

the province can intervene by withholding its approval over zoning plan changes, but this is very unlikely for them to do. If there ultimately is no agreement, the province can also assess the retail plan by using its own retail plan assessment commission. With regards to large-scale retail plans, municipalities have to submit an inventory of those large-scale retail plans that are in development to the province annually (although it is also claimed that this has to be submitted biannually). Large-scale retail plans need to be supported by a clear foundation, as the province wants to understand the consideration, the quality of the consideration, and its impact on the retail structure. With regards to the province's earlier project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)* in the first group, this project may have delivered solid advice, solutions, and action points. These results may have had an impact on municipalities' retail planning, but not a direct impact. From the perspective of regional authorities, there are also differences on the control of regional authorities. In the first group, the perceptions of regional authorities largely resemble the municipalities' perceptions. The sub-region often had a direct impact on municipalities' retail visions; their advice often ended up in retail visions. Regional retail visions sometimes provide arguments to make specific decisions. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission is confirmed to make binding decisions on retail plans, which municipalities have to adhere to. These decisions determine the terms and locations of the retail plans, if they are allowed. From the region's perspective, this seems to be a way of decentralisation (by the province). The province gave the sub-region permission to establish the commission, and also bestowed upon that commission the authority to assess retail plans within that sub-region. The larger region is not involved in assessing retail plans, but the sub-regions are. In the second group, also many perceptions of the regional authorities resemble municipalities' perceptions. Large-scale retail plans are assessed within the region. Regional agreements established the protocol and assessment criteria for this. Municipalities can raise objections to large-scale retail plans, but the assessments are limited. The region can not 'overrule' municipalities' decision-making, or impose sanctions or penalties. From the perspective of regional authorities, there are also differences on the control of the province. In the first group, the province's retail plan assessment commission assesses large-scale retail plans, which has an impact. Furthermore, the province gave permission for the establishment (and associated assessment responsibilities) of the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission. In the second group, it is confirmed that the province can intervene, on the basis of provincial policies. The province can make decisions, and often uses the region's advice for that. From the perspective of the province, there are the following perceptions on the province's control. The province seems to have the perception that, in the context of the local administrative culture, and in the context of the new spatial planning law, 'deciding from above' by the province would not be acceptable. Coordination on retail plans and policies is necessary. It needs to happen at the level that matters the most, and also at the most meaningful level. The choice of the most 'appropriate coordination level' is considered to be approached pragmatically by the province. The administrative level of coordination should never be an obstacle to inviting relevant actors to the discussion or consultation. Municipalities and the province are free to have an opinion on each other. The province does pay attention to quality-aspects of municipalities' retail visions. Among municipalities within the provinces in general, the province notices strong ambitions to act and to achieve goals in retail planning (such as concentrating retail areas), but they also notice that municipalities do not always know how to act. For some municipalities the province wonders why no action follows by these municipalities, especially if municipalities are mutually in agreement

with each other and have ambitions to act⁹. The province's retail plan assessment commission had an impact on municipalities' retail plans, as the commission often gave a negative advice on retail plans in the past. It is mentioned that the commission would like to prevent having to provide negative advice so often, and would want to do this by providing advice more 'proactively', and also in earlier stages of retail plan development. In this way, plan adjustments can still be made more easily. For submitting retail plans to the commission, retail plans have to be supported by many documents. There are also certain legal conditions that every retail plan has to meet. Furthermore, having held regional coordination on the retail plan is an obligatory condition for retail plans to be assessed.

Non-relevant indicators

There were indicators for which there were no substantive differences between the municipalities of the first group and the second group, and for which also no (relevant) minor differences existed. For this dimension of multi-level governance (decentralisation of retail planning competencies), this only applied to one indicator:

- *The experienced freedom by an actor to implement funding into projects (operational plans) for retail planning.*

This is the case because of the following causes. In both groups, it is experienced that municipalities generally do not initiate retail projects themselves. They are also not considered to initiate the development of new retail areas. Municipalities currently have a focus on concentrating retail areas because of current societal and market conditions. Only for developing entirely new city districts, which does not seem to happen very much anymore, some municipalities might consider to become involved in developing retail areas themselves. With regards to retail projects (operational plans), the province often provides support in managing, supplying manpower (capacity), and for the coordination of these local projects. Such projects may be aimed to stimulate retail development, or generate knowledge. However, it is experienced that the province generally does not financially 'pick up' specific local retail projects or development plans, as the province's projects always have to benefit the whole province, not just 'individual' municipalities.

5.2 Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors

The actor's experience with hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors

There are differences in the experience of a hierarchy in formal or informal relationships with other actors. In the first group, municipalities do not experience a hierarchy with governmental actors of 'higher' administrative levels (such as the sub-region, region, or province). It is considered that the province's interests overlap with those of the municipalities. For one municipality, there is a (minor) deviation. Their experience is that the province provides guidelines

⁹ It is important to mention again that this observation seems to be a 'general' observation about all the municipalities within the province in general, without connecting the observation to specific municipalities. Therefore this observation should be perceived in a different context than the selected cases.

to municipalities, which ultimately have to be complied with (although always in consultation). In the second group, the experience of a hierarchy remains unclear, and there are mutual differences among municipalities. For one municipality, no hierarchy is experienced, which is mostly attributed to practical and geographical circumstances (such as the very local catchment area of the municipality's retail structure). For one other municipality, it seems that different elements of a hierarchy are indicated. It is perceived that regional coordination is an obligation established by the province. The region is mentioned to have a fixed protocol for this, and has a central role in steering retail planning and assessing retail plans. Regional agreements are not one-sided. Consent by (and coordination with) other municipalities and the region is indicated to be necessary to proceed towards the province, and also to get approval for retail plans. As a last resort, the province can enforce coordination about retail plans. From the regional perspective, there are similarities. In both groups, regional authorities do not consider themselves to have a 'higher' position than municipalities in decision-making, and the regional authorities' advice is generally of a non-binding nature. Retail policies are the responsibility of municipalities themselves. But there are also differences from the regional perspective. In the first group, several elements are mentioned that might indicate a hierarchy. Sub-regional retail visions are legally determinative for what is possible for municipalities, and have a legal foundation. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission manages the establishment and relocation of companies in the involved municipalities, and makes decisions on these matters. In the second group, the region does not enforce municipalities' adherence to regional agreements, and does not impose penalties in cases of non-adherence. From the perspective of regional authorities, there are also different perceptions of a hierarchy with regards to the province. In the second group, it is experienced that the province can intervene in retail plans, and impose sanctions (although they have to be based on existing policies). In the first group, it is experienced that the roles have changed, and that the province now reaches out to municipalities much more. It is perceived that some municipalities (in the wider province) still perceive a hierarchy towards the province, and expect the province to tell them what to do. But from the province's perspective, this perception seems to be in rapid decline. There was a hierarchy in the past, as the province had the 'right of approval' over municipalities' zoning plans. Furthermore, in the past provincial executives could also withhold their approval over retail developments. But both of these possibilities are explicitly mentioned to not be the case anymore. Only when there are direct provincial interests, the province can intervene by submitting a 'viewpoint document'. But the province first always tries to prevent this by improving steering, and also by providing information in early stages. The province now operates at the same level as municipalities. They can not (and would not want to) take over municipalities' responsibilities. That would be considered undesirable, not allowed, and not practically possible. This premise also seems to apply to retail developments with (potentially) very negative local impacts; it is still perceived as the municipality's responsibility. However, it is confirmed that not all actors in the wider province are aware of these 'changes in the hierarchy'. Some market actors still approach the province if they disagree with municipalities' perspectives on their retail plan, under the impression that the province can intervene. The other way around, municipalities sometimes still ask the province for advice on 'regular' (non-large-scale) retail plans, which is used in multiple ways. Perceptions on roles do only change slowly.

The actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic plans to local spatial policy (or its help or support therein)

There are differences in the perceived roles of municipalities. In the first group, an emphasis is put on the municipalities' roles of motivating stakeholders, and being a problem-solver. In the second group, an emphasis is put on the municipalities' roles in the regional outlook. Municipalities are also problem-solvers by sharing information, knowledge, and expertise with other municipalities. However, motivating stakeholders is not a role for municipalities. From the regional perspective, there are differences in the perceived roles of regions. In both groups, the regional authorities had a role in collecting information on retail developments, keeping an eye on (retail) developments, and informing municipalities about them. They are also a process managers in coordinating retail developments and 'bridge builders'. However, in the first group, the larger region has the following roles: maintaining the connection between sub-regions (and also keeping them up-to-date, and helping in sharing learned lessons between them), being involved in sub-regions' meetings of civil servants, providing clarity in communication, and coordinating the establishment of a regional retail vision. Their role was also to set up a follow-up project (learning course) to the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)*, for which they held investigative viewings. In the second group, the region has the following roles: a central role in steering, and an indirect role in retail plan assessment. In the second group, municipalities can approach the region for advice on retail plans and regional policies. In the first group, this role has been largely transferred to the sub-regions. There are also differences in the roles towards the province. In the first group, the larger region encourages municipalities to contact the province, and ask them for help. The region plays a role in strengthening and developing new (non-hierarchy-based) relationships between municipalities and the province. In the second group, the region provides the province with advice on the municipalities' retail developments, which they collected information on. In the first group, there are many additional roles associated with the sub-region, which are confirmed for the sub-region's perspective. The sub-region has an informative role, monitoring role, and an important coordination role. Additionally (from the sub-region's perspective), the sub-region initiates its own research, sets up pilots for better informing municipalities on trend developments, provides unsolicited advice, and maintains its own retail plan assessment commission. In the first group, municipalities attribute the following roles to the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission: an advisory role (unsolicited and on request), and a decisive role in allowing or locating new retail developments. In the sub-region's perspective, other roles for its retail plan assessment commission are: holding investigative viewings at municipalities, investigating whether there are issues in which they can provide help, listening to municipalities' issues, strengthening relationships between municipalities, planning meetings and knowledge sessions for civil servants, and spreading information on retail issues. There are also differences in the perceived roles of the province. In both groups, different roles are attributed to the province, but these do not necessarily contradict. In the first group, the roles of the province are: leading in developing new retail policies (in the case of societal or sectoral problems), and facilitating (by providing subsidies and stimulation measures). In the second group, the roles of the province are: monitoring current large-scale retail developments, steering regions and municipalities, and providing meetings and knowledge sessions. Furthermore, the province organises research on the retail sector's functioning, holds the 'policy line' by focusing attention on the right policy fields, and makes decisions in 'regular' (non-large-scale) retail plan coordination if no agreement can be reached. From the regional

perspective, there are also differences in the province's roles. For both groups, the province makes decisions on retail plans that are submitted to them. In the first group, the province has an important role in retail planning. The province is present in official retail meetings, was present in the follow-up learning course, and has the role of initiating retail projects for municipalities. For the sub-region, it is confirmed that the province played an important role in organising the learning course. For the sub-region additional roles of the province are also highlighted: monitoring the performance of sub-regions, stimulating sub-regions to take action, informing sub-regions on developments nearby them that could have an impact, providing the framework in which (sub)regions and municipalities may act, and assessing large-scale retail plans (outside of the mentioned sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven). In the second group, the province has the following roles: to make decisions, to intervene sometimes (by directing), and to collect information on retail developments. From the province's perspective, the province has the following roles: setting up new retail policies (starting from a monitoring role), publishing on the current situation towards municipalities, urging municipalities to take action, bringing municipalities together, having municipalities talk and express their opinions, and building a support base (and thereby guarding the process of establishing regional agreements). Other roles are: 'signalling', warning, and raising awareness on the future retail offer, and also forecasting this future retail offer. Next to that, it includes raising awareness on the supply and demand of retail plans (and forecasting these). It is emphasised that the province has an 'accepted' role at the regional level. The role of the province's retail plan assessment commission is to assess new retail plans, judge whether or not they should be pursued, and to investigate their innovativeness and additional value very critically. The province's retail plan assessment commission advises towards municipalities, but also submits its advice to provincial executives.

The actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce

There are no substantive differences in the types of meetings that are held between municipalities in the regional context, and the frequency of these meetings. Both groups have a similar experience of the meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*). However, in the first group, these meetings are additionally used for discussing matters with the province, and making 'administrative connections' with other municipalities. In the second group, these meetings are used for discussing large-scale retail plans. From the province's perspective, the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) meetings are experienced to be important. These are administrative meetings on spatial issues, and have working groups attached to the different themes (housing construction, business parks, offices, and retail). These meetings are important for provincial and municipal interests to meet, and to make regional agreements. Therefore, the province's perspective seems to correspond to the first group's perspective. For the province, there is room for improvement in establishing regional agreements, but the province considers the municipalities' ambitions to be very positive. For other types of meetings, it is not possible to discuss them at the same level, because in the first group, most types of meetings are held at the sub-regional level instead of the regional level, because of decentralisation. But in both groups, both an official track of meetings and an administrative track of meetings exist. For the regional authorities, there are different perspectives on aforementioned meetings. In the first group, meetings are important for

discussing matters and making agreements. The sub-regional meetings are considered to be qualitatively very good, and also important for coordinating retail matters. It was considered of much additional value to improve and 'streamline' the coordination process in these meetings, which is why the task of checking municipalities' adherence to (sub)regional retail agreements was separated from these meetings, and transferred to an independent panel (which ultimately became the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission). In the first group, in the past, when the larger region's 'assignment' still included the policy field of retail planning, the larger region hosted the same tracks of (official and administrative) meetings as the sub-regions do now. Their official meetings focused on discussing concrete retail issues from municipalities, while their administrative meetings focused on problem-solving and providing advice, in which many expertise organisations and actors were involved. The larger region is still present at the official meetings of its sub-regions. In the second group, coordination about 'retail issues' is sometimes a part of the agenda of the administrative track of meetings. However, the last time that a 'retail coordination issue' was discussed there is mentioned to be longer ago. In general, in the second group there seems to be the perception among municipalities and the region that very extensive and frequent coordination on the theme of retail is not necessary. What can be done locally, is done locally. It seems that coordination within the region happens when it is necessary (for large-scale retail plans, or plans at 'peripheral' locations). In the first group, there is also a track of meetings in the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission, which seems to have an impact in the first group. These are very structured routine meetings, which are meant for discussing matters that municipalities have doubts about, such as significant shifts in retail developments. These meetings are experienced very well, and are considered to have much additional value, especially when municipalities dare to be vulnerable in them, share their problems and challenges, and help each other to take steps. Many actors, expertise organisations, and an independent chairman (and an independent consultant) are involved. Additionally, after its establishment, the commission held meetings at municipalities to build trust and confidence, and to inquire if there were issues, trends, developments, or investments (with an impact) that they could help them with. These meetings (and visits) led to municipalities being much more comfortable in submitting issues to the commission, and in asking them for advice. For the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission, mutual trust among municipalities is perceived to be important for good cooperation, just as building experience by handling cases. The province's retail plan assessment commission also has a track of meetings, in which requests are assessed. In these meetings, sectoral experts are present, who think in different directions, open the dialogue on retail plans, provide broad advice, and thereby help municipalities to improve their decisions and their retail visions. For the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)* in the first group, there were also regular meetings. These meetings were considered to be thematically consistent, creative, and challenging in opening discussions on matters.

Non-relevant indicators

There were indicators for which there were no substantive differences between the municipalities of the first group and the second group, and for which also no (relevant) minor differences existed. For this dimension of multi-level governance (the quality of power relationships between governmental actors), this applied to the following indicators:

- *The actor's experience with formal rules that constrain the relationships/interaction/cooperation with other (governmental) actors;*
- *The experienced change in the actor's relationship with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors after the recent major policy reform in retail planning (in 2004).*

Firstly, it seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in their experience with formal rules that constrain their relationships with other (governmental) actors. In both groups, all municipalities seem to have a type of protocol that regulates their (sub)regional coordination with other municipalities on retail matters. Generally, the formal rules leave room for consultation with governmental actors on other levels, either formally or informally. In general, often the possibility is mentioned for municipalities to object to other municipalities' decisions by means of such a protocol. (Sub)regional agreements between municipalities are also established on the basis of such protocols. Aforementioned protocols often also establish the obligations for municipalities to deliver information on current retail developments to (sub)regional authorities, as well as to the province. It seems that these protocols would have the largest impact on a municipality in situations where coordination would fail.

Secondly, it also seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in the experienced change of their relationships with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors. This indicator mostly concerned the establishment of the Nota Ruimte in 2004 (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004; Krabben, 2009). It is generally experienced that this Nota Ruimte had an influence on many different things, because it was a national regulation. However, as it now also concerns an 'older' regulation in spatial planning (with a relatively broad impact), respondents display different levels of awareness of the regulation itself. The fault in this specific indicator was that it took personal knowledge of the Nota Ruimte as a given fact, in order to get more insight into the regulation's impact. This has decreased the indicator's additional value. In reality, municipalities experienced that many different changes took place around the year of 2004, to which this national regulation was partly a response. This involved changes in the retail sector, changes in the role of sectoral research (purchase flow research), changes in the roles of governmental actors, and changes in the involvedness of provinces in retail planning. Because these changes were simultaneous processes, all municipalities consider it difficult to precisely demarcate the impact of the Nota Ruimte. Generally, it is considered likeable by respondents that the Nota Ruimte from 2004 may have had some impact on the relationships of municipalities with other governmental actors, but this is not explicitly assumed.

5.3 Municipal decision-making

The actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders

There were clear differences in municipal decision-making. One difference in decision-making was related to differences in the amount and type of disagreements between municipalities. The first group experienced relatively more disagreements about retail plans, and about their adherence to regional agreements, than the second group, but this was not related to differences in factors of multi-level governance. For the first group, developments like industry blurring and an increased competition between municipalities played a role, while for the second group

geographical circumstances (such as having more concentrated retail areas with local catchment areas and a smaller impact) also played a role. It seems that in the first group, there was an impact of the (sub)region on the amount of disagreements, which might have contributed to lowering that amount of disagreements. For that first group, shared interests grew over the years, bonds of trust were built, and the (sub)regional retail plan assessment commission did not often have to intervene. For the second group, the region did not enforce municipalities' adherence to regional agreements. For the province it seems that, in general, there sometimes can be disagreements or discussions in regional coordination meetings over matters between municipalities and the province, as they can have different interests. But the province does not locally intervene in municipalities. When regional agreements are breached by retail plans, the province does give its opinion, and can try to steer by submitting a 'viewpoint document', or by giving advice on (adapting) zoning plans. It seems that the province's retail plan assessment commission often has given negative advice on retail plans, but that mostly happened for retail plans that clearly had a negative impact on existing retail structures.

The perceived necessity by municipalities to make (or negotiate for) strategic retail plans for larger regions

Another difference in decision-making was related to differences that municipalities experienced in the need to regionally coordinate retail plans and policies. Both groups consider that important, but their perceived need to coordinate shows large differences. In the first group, the experienced need for coordination is large. The motivations for it seem inherent to the advantages of coordination, such as having knowledge of each others' developments, and preventing (sudden) large-scale developments with very negative impacts. In the second group, the experienced need for municipalities to coordinate seems to be low. Their motivations that play a role seem to be reactive to current (local) developments, such as experiencing alarming developments at 'peripheral' locations (in municipalities nearby), getting a grip on (negative) impacts of market forces, and explicitly considering the need to coordinate to be dependent on the situation. From the regional perspective, these experiences are the same. For the first group, the experienced need for coordination is large, and this need even increased because of their mutual disagreements (between municipalities). Their willingness to coordinate increased over the years. The prevention of inequalities and the preservation of city (or village) centres are both important factors in this. The region, sub-region, and the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission share these experiences. The sub-region additionally also shows reactive motivations for coordination, such as (countering) industry blurring, responding to increased (sub-regional) dynamism, researching (sectoral) developments, and preventing to be played out against each other (individually) by market actors. For the second group, the perspective of the regional authorities also seems to match the perspectives of their municipalities. From this (regional) perspective, municipalities do not experience a great need to cooperate regionally, or to develop larger retail visions. They seem to coordinate only when it is necessary (about large-scale developments). What can be done locally, is done locally, because most of them consider retail planning to be a local affair. It seems that only what has to be done regionally is done regionally. From the province's perspective, regional coordination is considered to be a very important responsibility. The regions' functioning and maintaining the regions' retail function mixes are both crucial to keeping municipalities' centres liveable. The province stimulates municipalities to act on

problems and to monitor developments. The management culture typical for municipalities from this province is mentioned to have had a positive influence on municipalities' willingness to coordinate in general. Some larger (city)municipalities initially held on to self-reliance, but this approach changed fast, and is still changing. Now most municipalities in the province do perceive a shared interest in coordination of retail plans and policies.

The extent to which arguments behind operational decisions reflect the strategic plan

A third difference in decision-making was related to differences in the extent to which municipalities' operational decisions reflected their retail visions. For both the first and the second group of municipalities, retail visions are used as assessment frameworks for retail plans, and as a basis for changes in zoning plans. There are 'hard' criteria in it, which are actively used for such assessments. Decisions on retail plans therefore have to reflect the retail vision, and deviations from it do not happen often. Retail plans outside of the retail structures that were determined and designated in the municipalities' retail visions are rejected most of the times, or they receive a very negative verdict. From the regional perspective, these findings on municipalities do match. However, there are also differences in the regional perspective. In the first group, in the possible case where a municipality would allow a large-scale retail plan that does not adhere to (sub)regional agreements, the sub-region might ask the involved municipality to uphold the law, and to seek a different location for the plan. In the second group, the region does not seem to have an impact on municipalities' decision-making for retail plans, or the assessments of them. However, with regards to operational decisions, there are also differences between the municipalities of both groups in their use of the retail vision. Both groups do use the retail vision also 'proactively', but for different purposes. In the first group, the retail vision is a guiding principle in decision-making on the relocation of stores, and it is also crucial in deciding which types of retail (and which retail formulas) municipalities want to attract to which retail area (which seems to involve locational marketing). Making clear decisions is considered important for preserving city (or village) centres. In the second group, municipalities use retail visions for decision-making on the reduction of (retail) planning overcapacity in zoning plans, and more specifically also for determining the limits of the municipalities' retail structures. Additionally, the second groups seems to make more use of internal 'intake commissions' for retail plan assessments. These internal 'intake commissions' consist of civil servants from different policy fields that make integral assessments of all submitted plans that 'touch upon' policies from different policy fields. They compare the submitted plan to multiple policies at once, in order to speed up the assessment process.

Non-relevant indicators

There were indicators for which there were no substantive differences between the municipalities of the first group and the second group, and for which also no (relevant) minor differences existed. For this dimension of municipal decision-making, which is placed in the 'multi-level governance' approach, and which is based on factors associated with leadership legitimacy and the inclusion of strategic plans into decision-making, this applied to the following indicators:

- *The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's knowledge and interpretation of the strategic plan behind operational decisions;*
- *The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's acceptance and use of the strategic plan as part of operational decision situations.*

Firstly, it seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in the extent of their operational decision-makers' knowledge and interpretation of the strategic plan behind operational decisions. In both groups, operational decision-makers have extensive knowledge of the municipality's strategic plan. Project leaders are also aware of the current local policies in their respective policy fields, as well as other relevant local policies that they have to take into account. For some municipalities, this is mentioned to even be obligatory for operational decision-makers and project leaders, because projects often involve different parts of different policy areas. Therefore, often multiple specialisations are involved in decision-making on projects (or operational plans). Some municipalities have internal 'intake commissions' for integrally assessing local retail plans, which include civil servants from different policy fields. In such commissions, the 'final' operational decision-makers (which are often responsible for issuing permits), are not always officially required to have 'full' knowledge of the entire current strategic retail plan (retail vision). This is because such an approach works with larger teams of 'expert' civil servants. If an 'intake commission' considers that a retail plan does not fit the zoning plan, or if it encounters an in-depth question, the policy department's consultants are often asked for additional advice. However, in practice all 'final' operational decision-makers (including those in internal 'intake commissions') do indeed have extensive knowledge of the municipality's retail vision, and are considered to be very informed on the retail visions' contents.

Secondly, it also seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in the extent of their operational decision-makers' acceptance and use of strategic plans as part of operational decision situations. In both groups, retail visions (and other policy visions) are used as assessment frameworks and provide the 'hard' criteria that are used for assessing retail projects. Retail visions also provide the assessment criteria for (retail-related) zoning plan adjustments. Except for the municipalities with an internal 'intake commission', in general the project leaders with a retail project in their portfolio will visit representatives from different policy departments, and present the submitted retail project that is 'under their guidance'. Then they will inquire if the retail project fits with the policies of each specific policy department. For all the selected cases (municipalities), policy content is approved by their municipal councils, and this process is strictly separated from practical assessments. This means that project leaders can not change or adapt existing policies, but have to accept these policies. However, within one municipality, different existing policies from different policy fields might contradict with each other, because policies often describe the most ideal situation for its own policy field. Especially in cases where multiple policies have to be taken into account for a single project, different policies may be in conflict. In such cases where policies contradict each other, project leaders generally leave the decision-making on the specific tradeoffs between policies to the municipal college, or ultimately to the municipal council. In both groups, it seems that retail visions are fully accepted for use in operational decision situations by the municipalities' operational decision-makers.

5.4 Quality and implementation of local plans

The extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in the strategic plan

There are differences in the inclusion of present local conditions and context in strategic retail policies (retail visions). In both groups, the current local circumstances were the starting point for developing municipalities' retail visions. All municipalities consider it an important responsibility to keep their retail visions up-to-date. In the first group, the great need for actualisation is attributed to changes in societal developments (such as an increase in vacant retail properties). Additionally in the first group, an emphasis is put on involving local actors (or stakeholders) in the actualisation process, while in the second group, an emphasis is put on developing the retail vision based on research findings (and on flexibly using retail functions). Therefore it seems that both groups have a different perspective on actualisation, and especially on the most preferred source for actualisation. However, in both groups' retail visions, there are no substantive differences in the inclusion of current retail structures (or hierarchies). In both groups detailed descriptions of local retail functions are included. These are applied to geographical parts of municipalities, either in clear maps or in descriptions. One difference is that in the first group, the consumer base (or types of shopping, or consumers' motives) are often analysed for the different retail functions and their connected geographic areas. This does not seem to be the case for the second group. There are also no substantive differences between both groups on the inclusion of local conditions. In both groups, municipalities' retail visions contain statistics on the respective municipalities, and describe the relevant characteristics of the municipalities and their retail areas. In both groups, there are mutual differences in the level of detail (or depth) of present local conditions. More specifically, it seems that in the first group there are internal differences in the scope of the spatial focus, while in the second group, it seems that there are internal differences in the scope of incorporated factors. For both groups, it seems that (generally) a larger scope of geographic areas or incorporated factors, equates to a lower level of depth in the analysis of the present conditions. Following the same premise, it seems that municipalities' retail visions with deeper analyses on the present conditions also include less factors; although some do indeed seem to combine that with achieving a wide geographic focus. In the first group, the retail visions additionally contain future perspectives, which are clearly drawn and firmly grounded on the analyses of current situations. In the second group, the present conditions of retail visions do generally not contain those future perspectives, but they do have a slight 'legal' emphasis. They contain overviews of current retail plans, specific 'hard' plans, or legal opportunities for developing them. However, there are differences between both groups in the inclusion of the current trends, and in the perspectives used to approach these trends. In the first group, there is an emphasis on national trends (or larger societal trends or changes) in the retail sector. The local impact of these national trends is detailed for all municipalities, and is even incorporated into future scenarios. However, the level of detail on the local impact of (national) trends differs mutually. In the second group, both national and local trends are included in the retail visions, and sometimes trends in legal changes are included as well. The extent of the impacts of these trends (and sometimes the possibilities to deal with them) are explained. However, the translation of trends (or their impacts) to future scenarios is not made here.

The extent to which the strategic plan contains a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and to improve commitment to plan goals

There are differences in the inclusion of a narrative storyline in strategic retail plans (retail visions) in order to motivate stakeholders, and improve commitment to plan goals. For both groups, it is mentioned that clarity in the communication towards stakeholders is important. It is considered that retail visions need to be easy to read, not full of jargon, and also need to provide clarity (to citizens) for making decisions. There are minor differences in the inclusion of stakeholders (or market actors) for the development of the retail visions. Although there is an exception in the second group, the first group generally seems more 'reaching out' in their attitude to involve different types of stakeholders in the development of their retail visions (and policies). The mentioned scope of stakeholders in the first group's retail visions often includes at least the inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and (retail) property owners, which are often supplemented with other stakeholders. In the second group, the emphasis is mostly put on involving entrepreneurs. However, there is also one major difference. It seems that in the first group, the respondents consider their retail vision to be a shared and supported story, and they do want it to be an invitation to other actors. It seems that in the second group, the respondents (generally) consider it not likely for their municipalities' retail visions to motivate stakeholders. It seems that possible causes might be conflicting interests among stakeholders (which seems to make some stakeholders disagree with the municipalities' perspectives and choices), or stakeholders not being interested in the municipalities' goals. In the comparison and analysis of municipalities' retail visions, aforementioned findings are largely confirmed. There are differences in the retail visions, which can be split among two factors: differences in the narrative storyline, and differences in the involvement of stakeholders. First, there are differences in the inclusion of narrative storylines to motivate stakeholders. In both groups, municipalities' retail visions offer clarity to stakeholders with regards to the 'course of action' to expect from the municipality, and providing clarity is mentioned there as a goal. However, in the first group, next to being used 'reactively' (for retail plan assessment), retail visions are also mentioned to be used proactively for the acquisition of companies, entrepreneurs, and investors. In addition to this, the first group's retail visions put an emphasis on the BIZ-regulation (for business investment zones). Some retail visions mention to explore the (practical) possibilities for using BIZ-regulations for stimulation, facilitation, and using it as a learning course. In the second group (with one notable exception), municipalities' retail visions do not seem to contain a clear storyline specifically aimed at motivating stakeholders, although in one retail vision, the BIZ-regulation is indeed mentioned. Secondly, between the retail visions, there are also differences in the involvement of local stakeholders. In both groups, (local) stakeholders were indeed very much involved in the development of the retail vision itself, but there are differences in their involvement in the implementation. In the first group, it is made very explicit that cooperation and 'joining forces' with local (external) actors or stakeholders is very important, even mandatory, to reach policy goals. This applies to both policy direction, projects-on-the-ground, coordination, and communication. Mutually, all municipalities in the first group seem to share a consensus on cooperation with local stakeholders in: (1) professionalising coordination itself; (2) organising consultation (and consultation platforms); (3) strengthening and maintaining existing retail structures; (4) joint-together marketing. In the second group, stakeholder input seems to have been important for the goals and decisions that were included in their retail visions. Stakeholders

were also important for clarifying local circumstances to the municipalities. But generally, it seems that (local) stakeholders do not have a clear role in the implementation of these retail visions.

The extent to which the strategic plan includes provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies

There are differences in extent to which strategic plans (retail visions) include provisions for the coordination with other (governmental) actors. In both groups, it is not described in their retail visions how the coordination of retail plans (or policies) with other governmental actors works. However, both groups deal with the exception of having one municipality with a retail vision for which the opposite is true (and that indeed describes specific coordination processes between municipality, sub-region, and region). However, there is one difference. In the second group, the responsibilities for coordination between (governmental) actors are clearly detailed, and addressed at different governmental levels. In the first group, the need for a directional framework (and steering) for retail developments by the province and national government is referred to sometimes. However, this does not seem to be a direct reference to coordination, but rather a reference to directional guidance. There are also differences in the extent to which retail visions include provisions for the coordination with (or connection to) existing policies. In general, in the first group retail visions do not seem to contain a policy framework or overview that details the existing local or regional policies, plans, or regulations (although there is an exception). In the second group, retail visions do seem to contain overviews of the current 'policy framework' for different levels (local, regional, and provincial policies). However, in the second group, there are mutual differences in the connection between these frameworks and the retail visions (and in their level of detail). The impacts of these 'policy frameworks' on the retail visions themselves do not always become clear, because they are not always connected. Next to that there is also one other difference. In the first group, the 'legal' implementation instruments (or tools) are highlighted, which includes matters like zoning plans, industry regulations, private agreements, urban reallocation measures, centre management organisations, steering groups, project stimulation measures, rental price adjustments, and most notably the BIZ-regulation (for business investment zones). In the second group, it seems that these 'legal' implementation instruments (or tools) are not described (although there is an exception).

The extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale)

There are differences in the extent to which retail visions include clear long-term goals. In the first group, it is not specifically mentioned by respondents if the municipality's long-term goals are included in the retail visions, while in the second group, the presence of these long-term goals in the retail visions is clearly mentioned. From the comparison and analysis of the retail visions, it seems that in both groups' retail visions the long-term goals are present. In the first group, a detailed thematic description of the goals is included, with an elaboration of the goals for different themes. The ambitions, viewpoints, and focus points of the municipalities are made clear. Viewpoints (and decisions) are supported by clearly motivated argumentations. Future perspectives or development directions are clearly described, and sometimes future scenarios are

additionally attached. For future perspectives, it is explained how they have an impact on the different geographic parts (or spatial layout) of the municipality, and on its retail functions. In the second group, the ambitions, viewpoints, and focus points of the municipalities are also included, and are supported by arguments. The impacts of these on the different spatial levels of the municipalities (neighbourhoods, districts, and municipality-wide) is also described. However, it seems that in the second group, the retail visions do not contain an elaboration of the desired policy goals into different specific themes. It also seems that they do not contain future perspectives or future scenarios. There are no substantive differences in the extent to which retail visions include a description of responsibilities for implementation, but there seem to be some minor differences. In the first group, the retail visions' responsibilities descriptions contain tasks and measures, and often the local actors that are responsible for their implementation are clearly designated. The roles and functions of different local actors are made clear. However, there are mutual differences in the level of depth (or detail) of the responsibilities that are designated to them, especially for the implementation, as some do seem to be more 'general'. In the second group, the retail visions' responsibilities descriptions contain a table that details the responsibilities of local actors. Measures are described, divided into tasks, and designated to different local actors. Tasks are connected to responsibilities for local actors, which are described (and divided) in detail. There are no substantive differences in the extent to which retail visions include a timescale for implementation. In both groups, retail visions generally do not contain timescales for implementation, although the municipality's goals and measures are often well-detailed. However, there are exceptions with regards to timescales. In the first group, one retail vision indeed has a full timescale for all 'action points', with a running period attached to each 'action point'. In another retail vision, a distinction is made between long-term goals and short-term goals, which indicates a 'general' time-planning perspective. In the second group, one retail vision has a type of timescale in its implementation program. Here all measures (or tasks) have time indications attributed to them, but there are differences within these types of designations. These can either be starting dates, desired frequencies of meetings, or summaries of ideal starting conditions.

Non-relevant indicators

There were indicators for which there were no substantive differences between the municipalities of the first group and the second group, and for which also no (relevant) minor differences existed. For this dimension of the effectiveness of municipal retail planning (the quality of local plans), this applied to the following indicators:

- *The extent to which the strategic plan design is accessible to the wider public;*
- *The extent to which the strategic plan was perceived to be useful in supporting decision-making.*

Firstly, it seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in the extent to which their strategic plan designs (or the outline or design of their retail vision) are accessible to the wider public. In both groups, retail visions are 'physically' publicly accessible to the wider public, and are also publicly accessible via the internet. Despite seemingly having differences in their perceptions on the involvement of different types of stakeholders, all municipalities consider that their retail visions are clear in their communication and language towards stakeholders,

entrepreneurs, inhabitants, real estate property owners, and investors. It is sometimes mentioned that not all motivations behind the municipalities' choices are always understood by stakeholders, just as the reasons behind their frameworks for allowing or prohibiting certain developments are not always understood. But generally, municipalities consider their retail visions to be clear in communicating these matters. In both groups, clarity in communication towards stakeholders seems to be considered equally important, as this might improve the stakeholders' decision-making processes as well.

Secondly, it seems that there are no substantive differences for both groups in the extent to which their strategic plans (retail visions) were perceived to be useful in supporting decision-making. In both groups, retail visions are used for many different types of decisions. They are often a 'fixation' of the municipality's choices, and are thus 'strictly' used in decision-making. For all municipalities, retail visions are often used to decide upon (or establish earlier-decided) boundaries of their retail structures. Based on these boundaries, the location of a retail project will help determine whether retail plan is allowed or not. The retail visions also contain the 'hard' assessment criteria for retail plans. Generally, it is not allowed to make spatial planning decisions that are in conflict with the retail vision. Operational decision-makers (or project leaders) can not independently deviate from a retail vision. Decisions on projects (operational plans) are mostly based on established policies, which are considered to have a leading directive. For most municipalities, the retail visions are also used for decision-making on (retail-related) zoning plan adjustments. Next to that, they are also used for decisions on reducing the unused planning capacity (in retail) in existing zoning plans. It is perceived that market actors (such as project developers) are generally well aware that the municipality's visions are used for assessing their retail plans.

6. Comparative analysis

In this chapter, the four dimensions that are relevant for this research are further elaborated. Therefore, this chapter has been divided into four dimensions. These are the same four dimensions that are addressed by the sub-questions of this research (which can be found in chapter '*1.3 Research question*'), and that were also used in the previous chapter for classifying the results:

- Decentralisation of retail planning competencies;
- Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors;
- Municipal decision-making;
- Quality and implementation of local plans.

Within this chapter, each dimension consists of two different parts. In the first part of each dimension, the relevant sub-question is answered. This concerns the original sub-questions that can be found in chapter '*1.3 Research question*'. The answers to the sub-questions are directly based on the results from chapter '*5. Results*', and are therefore based on the respondent interviews and the qualitative content analyses. The answers to the sub-questions are data-driven, which was a conscious decision. The process of answering the sub-questions has been used as a method to aggregate the most relevant information from the results, which further focuses the research. Within the context of this research (and within this research process), the sub-questions have been used as methodological 'tools' to be able to achieve more focused datasets with a higher relevance. The sub-questions have not been used in a 'classical' way. As a consequence of this decision, the combined answers to the sub-questions do not (directly) form the answer to the main research question, as would be the case in a more 'classical' way of research.

In the second part of each dimension, the answers to the sub-questions are subjected to a theoretical comparison. Each theoretical comparison is connected to a sub-question's answer, and is divided into its original indicators in order to achieve a higher theoretical depth. In this theoretical comparison, it is first analysed to what extent the answer to the sub-question fits the operationalisation from chapter '*2.2 Measuring multi-level governance in retail planning*'. Thereby it is also investigated to what extent the answers connect to the theories and studies that have been used for developing these indicators. This may provide an indication of the construct validity of the developed indicators (the extent to which they have accurately measured the theoretical concepts) (Yin, 2018). In this same theoretical comparison, the answers to the sub-questions are then extensively compared to the theoretical framework from chapter '*2.1 Theoretical framework*'. In that way, it can be established to what extent the answers to the sub-questions fit with earlier theories on the research concepts.

By comparing the sub-questions' answers (in the first part of each dimension) to the operationalisation and the theoretical framework (in the second part of each dimension), the comparative analysis was made to be more focused. Instead of comparing all research results with the theoretical framework, only the most relevant results are compared with the theoretical framework. This is perceived to have made the overall comparison clearer, because it allowed for the comparison itself to be expanded in its depth, due to the omission of certain less relevant results. The answers themselves could be studied with more nuance, and their details provided a clearer perspective of the situation and context of the selected cases.

6.1 Decentralisation of retail planning competencies

6.1.1 Answering the first sub-question

The first sub-question was:

“In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their decentralisation of retail planning competencies, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?”

Here follows the answer to this sub-question, based on the results from chapter ‘5. Results’.

There were clear differences in factors related to the decentralisation of retail planning competencies. One of these factors was the actor’s argument for its involvement in the development of (strategic) retail policies. For the first group, their main reason for involvement was preserving city (and village) centres, next to maintaining social cohesion. For the second group, their main reason for involvement was concentrating retail areas. Regional authorities also have different reasons for involvement. In the first group, these are: bringing municipalities together, protecting municipalities against market influences, and maintaining centre attractiveness, liveability, services, and community life in municipalities. In the second group, the reasons are narrower: coordinating large-scale retail plans, and strengthening the business climate. The province’s reason for involvement is monitoring developments, communicating knowledge towards municipalities, improving municipalities’ decision-making, and stimulating the development of (sub)regional agreements. The province’s commission is intended for assessing retail plans, while the province’s project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)* is intended for developing knowledge for municipalities, and making them consider current developments.

A second factor was the experienced influence on municipalities’ retail planning (through external actors) by municipalities themselves. First, this concerns other municipalities (at the regional level). For the first group, municipalities have an influence on each other through negotiation in the regional context, while for the second group, this influence is limited. In the first group, regional authorities mainly have an influence by providing the framework for acting, holding back developments that do not adhere to (regional) agreements, providing unsolicited advice, and evaluating municipalities’ retail policies. The sub-region’s retail plan assessment commission provides an extra layer of influence. It supports some aforementioned (sub)regional tasks, but also assesses (large-scale) retail plans, determines conditions for them, warns municipalities on zoning plans, conducts independent research into specific retail sub-sectors, and informs municipalities on the commission’s research. The commission also asks municipalities what they can help with. In the second group, regional authorities mainly have an influence through developing policies for concentrating retail areas, and gathering information on developments. Regional coordination happens when it is necessary. There are different experiences of the province’s influence. In the first group, the province provides the framework for retail visions, while in the second group, the province obligates municipalities to coordinate their (large-scale) retail plans regionally. For both groups, the province can hold back undesired developments, while for the province, this is not the case. For the province, it is considered that the province plays a role in preventing negative developments, but can not hold back negative

developments. The province will generally not intervene, but may indeed submit a 'viewpoint document' when direct provincial interests are at stake (and regional agreements for coordination are not adhered to). The province's retail plan assessment commission also had an influence on many retail plans, but this influence does not differ between groups. In the first group, the province amplified regional authorities' influence by giving permission for initiating the sub-regional retail plan assessment commission. This commission is involved in the assessment process, and is also administratively involved. For the municipalities of the first group that participated in the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)*, the province is considered to have become more involved in retail planning because of the project. For (and by) municipalities, the project is considered to have raised awareness on the impact of decision-making processes and administrative cultures on retail planning.

A third factor was the hierarchical position of places within the region. There are differences in composition. The first group contains one big city, but more villages. The city has specialised (regional) retail functions, and the villages have local retail functions. There is mutual understanding that the villages need the city for proximity, while the city needs commercial support (inflow) from the villages' inhabitants. Villages are aware of their position, and are content with it. For all regional authorities, an emphasis is put on the additional value of municipalities having the self-knowledge of knowing their (regional) positions and functions. In the first group, in the sub-region, the coherence and dynamism among municipalities seem larger, because of the larger amount of retail plans that arises (and are submitted for assessment). The second group contains more cities; among them one smaller city, but only one village. Both cities have (regional) retail functions, but of a limited nature. One city has a large, but very local catchment area, while the other city has retail overcapacity, and a limited inflow. The mentioned village has local retail functions.

A fourth factor was the actor's experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external actors. In both groups, municipalities are responsible for their own policies, and are not involved in each others' policies. Regional coordination is obligatory in the case of large-scale retail plans. However, there is a difference in the approach. In the first group, non-adherence to regional agreements could lead to legal conflicts with other (governmental) actors. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission has the obligation to assess all large-scale retail plans. The first group also maintains policies to decrease the impact of competitive negotiation by market actors; these policies might contribute to prevent the non-adherence of regional agreements. In the second group, adherence to regional agreements on large-scale retail plans is expected. Consultation on such cases with the region and province is also expected. Not reaching an agreement could lead to the province assessing the large-scale retail plan. There is also a difference in the perception on the province's control. In both groups, the province can intervene, but this is considered not very likely. In the first group, non-adherence to regional agreements could lead to the province not cooperating, or withholding its support on the retail plan. For deviating from provincial policies, municipalities have to have good reasons. In the second group, non-adherence to regional agreements (or not coordinating, or not considering the impacts of retail plans) can lead to the province withholding its approval over zoning plan changes. If there ultimately is no agreement, the province can decide to assess the retail plan with its own retail plan assessment commission. Large-scale retail plans need to be supported by a clear foundation. From the perspective of regional authorities, the perceptions largely resemble the municipalities' perceptions in both groups. In the first group,

the sub-region had a direct impact on municipalities' retail visions, and their advice often ended up in them. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission makes binding decisions, which determine the terms and locations for retail plans, if they are allowed. Municipalities have to adhere to these decisions. The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission's establishment was permitted by the province, and the commission's authority for retail plan assessment was bestowed upon them by the province. Except regional agreements, regional retail visions sometimes also provided arguments for the commission to make specific decisions. In the second group, large-scale retail plans are confirmed to be assessed within the region. However, these assessments are limited in their actual influence, as the region can not 'overrule' municipalities' decision-making, or impose sanctions or penalties. Still, municipalities can raise objections to retail plans. The protocol and assessment criteria for this assessment are established in regional agreements. There are also different perspectives on the province's control, both by the regional authorities and the province. In the first group, the province's retail plan assessment commission assesses large-scale retail plans (outside of the sub-region). The province also established the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission. In the second group, the province can intervene and make decisions on the basis of provincial policies. For the province, in the context of the local administrative culture, and in the context of the new spatial planning law, 'deciding from above' would not be acceptable. Coordination on retail plans and policies is necessary, and needs to happen at the level that matters the most (or the most meaningful level). The province is pragmatic in this choice of a coordination level, as it is considered that this coordination level should never be an obstacle to inviting relevant actors to the consultation. The province's retail plan assessment commission had an impact on municipalities' retail plans, as it often gave negative advice on retail plans in the past. For submitting retail plans to the commission, they have to be supported by many documents, and there are certain legal conditions that every retail plan has to meet. Furthermore, regional coordination on the retail plan is obligatory to have happened beforehand.

6.1.2 Comparative theoretical analysis and discussion

The convincingness of an actor's argument for its involvement in the development of strategic plans in retail planning

At different levels, there were differences between both groups in the actors' arguments to be involved in retail planning. At the municipal level, these differences existed between both groups. At the level of the regional authorities, these differences existed too, especially in the range of motivations. The province's motivation seemed to apply equally to all municipalities.

Fit into the operationalisation of Prud'homme (1995), different governmental levels (groups of municipalities and regional authorities) indeed seem to have different interests (and competencies) for being involved in the policy field of retail planning. The two groups seem to be involved in retail planning in different ways (Prud'homme, 1995). From multi-level governance theory, the motivation to coordinate indeed seems important in both groups (although only for specific plans in the second group) (Peters & Pierre, 2001). It seems that in the first group, regional authorities have much more different motivations to be involved at the municipal level than in the second group, regardless of the formal dependence, which might indicate a higher level of multi-level governance in the first group (Piattoni, 2009).

The number of (governmental) actors from different jurisdictions having an influence on retail planning in the municipality

At different levels, there were also differences between both groups in the influence on municipalities' retail planning that municipalities (and regional authorities) experienced. At the municipal level, there were differences in the influence of municipal negotiation, and also in the range and types of influence that regional authorities had on municipalities' retail planning. It seems that both groups also have a different perception of the province's influence.

Fit into the operationalisation of Hooghe and Marks (2001), it seems that the number of governmental levels involved in retail planning differs between both groups. As an approximation of multi-level governance, it seems that not only the number of regional authorities is different, but also the number of different ways in which they have influence. For the province however, this does not seem to apply (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). From multi-level governance theory, the encountered influence of inter-municipal (regional) negotiation seems important. In the first group, this type of negotiation seems to have more influence on municipalities' retail policies. This seems to be negotiation with a 'spatial nature', as it concerns territorial policy decisions between municipalities (Piattoni, 2009). This influence of negotiation might indicate a higher level of multi-level governance in the first group. Also, only coordination about the large-scale retail plans seems to be obligatory in the second group. This seems to be a decision-making 'rule' in its governance system, but in itself might not indicate a higher level of multi-level governance (Marks, 1996). However, the indication that in the second group, coordinating large-scale retail plans has a more 'obligatory nature', might indeed indicate a higher dependence on hierarchy in the second group's governance system. It seems that in both groups, 'regular' retail coordination processes can be considered non-hierarchical (or non-obligatory) (Peters & Pierre, 2001). It also seems that in the first group, regional authorities have many more influences (and also more different types of influence) on municipalities' retail planning. It seems that many of these influences (some of which are associated with coordination), also contribute to improving the coordination process itself in the long term (Piattoni, 2009). Many of these additional influences can be associated with the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission. The different perceptions on the province's influence also seem important, as they might indicate the role of the province in such a governance system (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). There are differences in the role that the province seems to have. However, generally the province does not seem to have a direct influence on municipalities' retail policies. It also seems that the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak* (*Heart for the Business Together*) had no direct influence on municipalities' retail policies.

Hierarchical position of places within the region

In both groups, there also differences in the position of places within the spatial hierarchy of the region. In the first group, one city has more specialised retail functions compared to the two cities in the second group. However, the extent to which this might indicate different levels of multi-level governance remains unclear, which is further explained in chapter '7.2 Recommendations'. It seems that this difference in a spatial hierarchy might influence municipalities' retail planning in some ways, but this falls outside the scope of this research, as it was not possible to explain it with the currently used theories.

The experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external (governmental) actors

At different levels, there were also differences between both groups in the actors' experienced control over policy content in retail planning. At the municipal level, there were differences in the consequences of non-adherence to regional agreements. There is also a different perception on the province's role if no agreement can be reached (regionally). At the level of the regional authorities, these differences are reflected. There were differences in the extent to which advice from regional authorities ended up in municipalities' retail visions, the influence of 'binding decisions' on retail plans, and the possibilities for acting after non-adherence to regional agreements. Both groups and the province also have different perceptions on the province's intervention possibilities.

Fit into the operationalisation of Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Smith (1997), it indeed seems that there are differences in the municipalities' control over policy content in retail planning. Besides policy content, this also concerns retail plans and adherence to regional agreements. From multi-level governance theory, municipalities are responsible for their own retail policies in both groups. However, in the first group there are specific policies established (regionally) to prevent the non-adherence to regional policies, and there non-adherence could eventually lead to legal conflicts with other governmental actors. This seems to be coordination of a 'spatial nature', as it concerns coordination on the actors' responsibilities and accountability (Piattoni, 2009). It also seems that, for these two ways to prevent non-adherence to work, coordination between different levels is fundamental. Especially the specific policy to prevent non-adherence to regional agreements (the 'one counter' policy) is not aimed at decision-making, but at networking. It specifically prevents municipalities' competition in decision-making on retail locations by increasing 'networking' between municipalities, without the interference of market actors. According to Sabel and Zeitlin (2008), the importance of this new 'networking dimension' between different governmental levels could indicate a higher level of multi-level governance. It seems that these two ways to prevent non-adherence are absent in the second group. One of the most prominent differences seems to be the way of assessing large-scale retail plans if there is disagreement in the region. In the first group's sub-region, the sub-regional retail plan assessment commission does this, while in the second group, the province's retail plan assessment commission does this. Quite literally, this has decentralised decision-making on specific issues (of a 'spatial nature', as it concerns specific spatial decisions) to a lower governmental level (Piattoni, 2009). In the first group, this has seemingly created a new role for the (sub)regional authorities (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Thus it seems that a change in the distribution of policy competencies in this policy field has happened (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). In the first group, both the lower-level decision-making, new roles for governmental actors, and the redistribution of policy competencies to governmental actors may indicate a higher level of multi-level governance. At the level of the regional authorities, aforementioned differences are reflected, which causes some other differences. It results in the situation that, at the level of regional authorities, decisions by the (sub-region's) retail plan assessment commission in the first group are 'binding decisions' for municipalities, while in the second group, regional assessments of retail plans (which are conducted for specific large-scale retail plans) do not seem to be of a 'binding nature', as the regional authorities can not enforce municipalities' adherence or impose penalties. This seems coherent for the second group's planning system, where the 'binding assessments' are conducted at the provincial level. Besides the earlier-mentioned examples, here it also seems that the

decentralisation of decision-making on specific issues has again changed the governance system itself (Piattoni, 2009). More specifically, it seems to have changed ‘rules’ of the governance system, most notably on the ‘binding nature of decisions’ (Marks, 1996). Besides that, it seems that in the first group advice from regional authorities ended up in municipalities’ retail visions much more than in the second group. This does seem to match the idea of Peters and Pierre (2001) that the non-hierarchical exchange between different governmental levels is very important, and it might indicate a higher level of multi-level governance. It is considered that the province has some (limited) possibilities to intervene in retail planning, but will generally almost never do that. It seems that from the province’s perspective, that would not be acceptable, because of many different considerations. The province seems to be ‘pragmatic’ with regards to coordination, as it is considered that coordination on retail plans and policies is indeed necessary, but always needs to happen at the spatial level that matters the most. The choice of a coordination level should also never be an obstacle to inviting relevant actors to the ‘negotiation table’. This idea seems to be reflected in the province’s decision to allow a sub-region to establish a retail plan assessment commission, and to bestow upon it the authority to assess large-scale retail plans (instead of the province itself conducting such assessments). The province’s perspective, and the decentralisation of these assessments, both seem to confirm the decentralisation of specific decision-making powers of a ‘spatial nature’ (responsibilities and accountability) (Piattoni, 2009). Finally, the province’s retail plan assessment commission seems to have had a direct impact on many concrete retail plans, but not specifically on retail policies (although the commission’s assessment procedure may have functioned as a legal guarantee for starting or accelerating regional coordination among municipalities sometimes).

6.2 Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors

6.2.1 Answering the second sub-question

The second sub-question was:

“In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their quality of power relationships between (governmental) actors, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?”

Here follows the answer to this sub-question, based on the results from chapter ‘5. Results’.

There were clear differences in factors related to the quality of power relationships between (governmental) actors. One of these factors was the actor’s experience of a hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors. In the first group, a hierarchy with other (governmental) actors was not experienced (although there was one exception). In the second group, the experience of a hierarchy remains unclear, due to differences among municipalities. For one municipality, there is a lack of hierarchy, but not because of relationships between (governmental) actors: geographic circumstances play a role, such as having a very local catchment area. Another municipality indicates elements that can be attributed to a hierarchy: a (provincial) obligation for regional coordination, a fixed regional coordination protocol, the legal multi-sidedness of regional agreements, and the necessity of other municipalities’ consent for getting approval on retail plans. For the regional authorities, there are also differences. In the first

group, sub-regional retail visions are determinative for what is possible for municipalities, and the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission makes decisions on the establishment and relocation of companies. In the second group, regional authorities do not enforce municipalities' adherence to regional agreements, and do not impose penalties in cases of non-adherence. To summarise this difference: in the first group, the sub-region's framework has certain 'elements' that might be considered hierarchical, but the municipalities themselves do not experience a hierarchy. In the second group, the regional framework seems to lack hierarchical elements, but the municipalities' experience of hierarchy is not entirely consistent. For one municipality, 'elements' that might be considered hierarchical are indicated. There is also a different perspective from regional authorities on the province. In the first group, it is considered that the province's role has changed, and the province increasingly reaches out to municipalities. Some municipalities (in the wider province) still perceive a hierarchy, but this perception is in rapid decline. In the second group, the province can intervene in retail plans, and can impose sanctions, based on policy. The province's perspective is that there was a hierarchy in the past. This included the 'right of approval' over municipalities' zoning plans, and provincial executives being able to withhold their approval over retail plans. But this is not the case anymore. The province operates at the same level as municipalities, and can not (and would not) take over municipalities' responsibilities. Only in the case of direct provincial interests, such as non-adherence to regional agreements, the province can intervene by submitting a 'viewpoint document'. However, not all actors in the wider province are aware of all these changes.

A second factor was the actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' retail visions to local spatial policy (or help or support therein). In both groups, the role of the municipality is being a problem-solver. In the first group, motivating stakeholders is also a role of municipalities, while in the second group, it is not. For regional authorities, there are differences on the roles of regional authorities. In the first group, regional authorities have additional roles: maintaining the connection between sub-regions, informing them, helping to share lessons between them, being involved in their meetings, providing clarity in communication, coordinating the establishment of a regional retail vision, and setting up a follow-up project for the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak (Heart for the Business Together)*. In the first group, the sub-region has many additional roles: informing, monitoring, an important coordinating role, initiating its own (sectoral) research, setting up pilots for better informing municipalities, providing unsolicited advice, and maintaining its retail plan assessment commission. Its (sub-regional) retail plan assessment commission has the following additional roles: advising municipalities (unsolicited and on request), holding investigative viewings at municipalities, investigating if there are issues at municipalities in which they can provide help, listening to municipalities, strengthening relationships between municipalities, planning meetings and knowledge sessions for civil servants, and communicating information on retail issues. They have a decisive role in allowing or locating retail developments. In the second group, regional authorities had the following additional roles: a central role in steering on retail planning, and an indirect role in retail plan assessment. Regional authorities have a different role towards the province. In the first group, regional authorities play a role in strengthening and developing new (non-hierarchy-based) relationships between municipalities and the province. They encourage municipalities to ask the province for help. In the second group, regional authorities provide their monitoring information to the province. There are differences in the perceived role of the province. In the first group, the province's roles are emphasised as focusing on: leading in developing new retail policies, and facilitating (by subsidies and

stimulation). In the second group, the province's roles are: monitoring large-scale retail developments, steering regions and municipalities, holding the 'policy line', and making decisions on 'regular' retail plans (if no agreement can be reached). According to regional authorities, the province also has different roles. For the first group's regional authorities, the province has many different roles in retail planning: being present in official meetings and the follow-up learning course of the project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*), organising this learning course, initiating retail projects, monitoring sub-regions' performance and stimulating them to take action, informing regions and sub-regions on developments (with an impact), providing the framework for acting (of regional authorities and municipalities), and assessing large-scale retail plans. For the second group's regional authorities, the province has the following roles: making decisions on retail plans, monitoring retail developments in general, and intervening (sometimes). From the province's perspective, their roles mostly align with the first group's perceptions: developing new retail policies, communicating on current developments, stimulating municipalities to take action, having municipalities discuss and express their opinions, building a support base, guarding the establishment of regional agreements, and signalling (or warning, raising awareness, and forecasting) on future supply and demand of retail plans. The province's retail plan assessment commission has the roles to assess retail plans, very critically investigate these retail plans' innovativeness and additional value, and communicate their findings to municipalities and provincial executives.

A third factor was the actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors, and the decisions that such meetings produce. Both groups have a similar experience of the meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*). However, in the first group, these meetings are also used for discussing matters with the province, and making 'administrative connections'. In the second group, these meetings are used for discussing large-scale retail plans. For the province, these meetings are important to make provincial and municipal interests meet, and to make regional agreements. It seems that the province's perspective corresponds to the first group's perspective. From the perspective of regional authorities, both groups have an official track of meetings and an administrative track of meetings. However, in the first group, these meetings are organised at the sub-regional level, while in the second group, these meetings are organised at the regional level. In the first group, these meetings are for discussing matters, and making agreements. They are considered to be qualitatively very good, and important for coordinating retail matters. In the second group, 'retail issues' are not often discussed in these meetings. In the second group, there seems to be the perception among municipalities and regional authorities that extensive and frequent coordination on the theme of retail may not be necessary. What can be done locally, is done locally. Additionally, in the first group, it was considered of much additional value to improve and 'streamline' the coordination process in such (official and administrative) meetings. For this purpose, the task of checking municipalities' adherence to (sub)regional agreements was separated from these meetings, and transferred to an independent panel (which became the retail plan assessment commission). The sub-region's retail plan assessment commission also has its own meetings, which are used for discussing matters that municipalities have doubts about. These meetings are experienced very well, and are considered to have much additional value, especially when municipalities dare to be vulnerable, share their (retail) problems and challenges, and help each other to take steps. This same commission also initiated meetings held at many of the involved municipalities directly after the commission's establishment, in order to build trust

and confidence, and to inquire if there were issues, trends, developments, or investments, for which they could provide help. These meetings led to municipalities being much more comfortable in submitting issues to the commission, and to ask them for advice. In the first group, for the province's project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaak* (*Heart for the Business Together*), there were also regular meetings organised by the province, which were considered to be thematically consistent, creative, and challenging in opening discussions on matters.

6.2.2 Comparative theoretical analysis and discussion

The actor's experience with hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors

At different levels, there were differences between both groups in the actors' experiences of a hierarchy in their formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors. At the municipal level, there are no clear differences on the experience of a hierarchy. At the level of regional authorities, there are differences in the presence of 'hierarchical elements', but there are inconsistencies in the experience of it. Regional authorities and the province seem to be consistent in their perceived lack of a hierarchy with regards to the province.

Fit into the operationalisation of Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Prud'homme (1995), considering the presence of a hierarchy in relationships between different (governmental) actors is indeed relevant. There seem to be minor differences in their experience of a hierarchy (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Prud'homme, 1995). Although in both groups no clear hierarchy was experienced among municipalities in their relationships with other (governmental) actors, the experienced lack of a hierarchy in the second group can be attributed to geographical circumstances in one case, such as having a local catchment area. No interactions of a 'relational nature' seem to be of influence here, but instead differences in geography (Piattoni, 2009). Following Prud'homme's (1995) study, such geographic differences might have an impact on the multi-level governance system, although they were not incorporated within the scope of this research. At the level of the regional authorities, there seem to be differences in the hierarchy. The strategic regional retail visions at 'higher' levels seem to have stricter frameworks on determining what is possible for municipalities in the first group, while simultaneously the enforcement of municipalities' adherence to regional agreements seems to be stricter in the first group too. Both seem to concern interactions of a 'spatial nature', as they concern the distribution of authority (Piattoni, 2009). Also, these are 'formal' (hierarchical) interactions between the system, the possibilities that the system provides, and the actors in it (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Regardless of those differences, there does not really seem to be a substantive difference in the municipalities' experience of a hierarchy. Following Marks' (1996) theory, it is possible that new 'rules' on decision-making may have interacted with the established governance system in the first group in earlier phases, and are now considered the 'norm', which could explain the experienced lack of a hierarchy (while simultaneously having some elements that might be considered hierarchical). However, this is a speculation, as there is no certainty on the causes for that. Besides a few remaining 'intervention possibilities' for the province, it is considered by all actors that the province is in the process of a rapid change. In this policy field, the province may have had a more hierarchical role in the past, but this is not the case anymore, and subsequently this perception is in rapid decline among municipalities. In the past, the province had much more far-

reaching legal 'intervention possibilities'. Now it seems that the province would generally not intervene in or between municipalities, or their responsibilities. Following Sabel and Zeitlin's (2008) theory, the change in the governance system seems to have created new roles for municipalities and the province, besides causing a change in the decision-making rules (Marks, 1996). Formally, these governance levels seem to have become more independent from each other (Piattoni, 2009). Because of that, and because of their new roles, they now have to rely more on networking than just decision-making (Piattoni, 2009; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008).

The actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic plans to local spatial policy (or its help or support therein)

At different levels, there were also differences between both groups in the actors' roles in their translation of 'higher-level' retail visions to local spatial policy (or their help or support therein). At the municipal level, there is only a minor difference in this. At the level of the regional authorities, there are differences in the amount of roles for regional authorities, and the range of such roles. The most differences seem to exist in the roles of regional authorities towards the province, and in the perceptions of all actors on the province's roles.

Fit into the operationalisation of Prud'homme (1995), the differences in roles seem to be present at the level of the regional authorities and in the perceptions of the province's role, which seems to reveal these actors' roles and responsibilities in the provision of 'specific services' in this policy field. At the level of the regional authorities, the regional authorities in the first group have many more different (and additional) roles in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic retail visions to local spatial policy (or in supporting that process), than the regional authorities in the second group. These additional roles seem to exist both at the level of the region, sub-region, and the sub-region's retail plan assessment commission, and might have been established through the 'new' (multi-level) governance system (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). This might indeed be connected to multi-level governance, as many new roles seem to fit in the dimension of 'networking' between different governance levels (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Next to that, many of the new roles seem to be aimed at improving coordination at different governmental levels, increasing clarity in communication between them, monitoring developments, and sharing information and lessons between (governmental) actors. Many of these roles also seem to be 'proactive', and indeed concern developing regional retail policies, initiating (sectoral) research, providing unsolicited advice, maintaining (or improving) aforementioned (sub-regional) retail plan assessment commission, inquiring for possibilities to provide help, and strengthening relationships between (governmental) actors. Thus it seems that the new roles that these regional authorities have because of their 'new' governance system, are actively used to improve coordination and negotiation between different levels (Piattoni, 2009). Many roles are 'proactive' and seem to be non-hierarchical, in the sense that they aim to improve the quality of decision-making at another governmental level (the municipalities), but not by intervening (Peters & Pierre, 2001). Interestingly, most of the changes in roles do not seem to be coupled with changes in the 'rules' of decision-making. The other way around, the perceptions on actors' roles seems to be unrelated to the actors' perceptions on the decision-making system (Marks, 1996; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Regional authorities also have differences in their roles towards the province. In the first group, regional authorities are involved in strengthening and developing non-hierarchical exchanges between different governance levels, which is important for multi-level governance (Peters & Pierre, 2001). In the second group, this does not seem to be the case. The different perceptions

on the province's role also seem to be relevant. In the first group, at the municipal level, the province's role seem to be more 'proactive', as it includes 'leading' in developing new policies, while at the municipal level of the second group, the province's role seem more 'reactive', as it concerns 'steering' and holding the 'policy line'. At the level of the regional authorities, this same difference of perception seems to be reflected. Furthermore, it seems that in the first group the province has a more 'boosting' role towards sub-regions. The province's own perspective seems to largely correspond to the first group's perspective, as stimulating and connecting municipalities seems to fit into the province's perspective, as well as developing new retail policies. All actors agree on the usefulness of particular assessment and monitoring roles for the province.

The actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce

At different levels, there were also differences between both groups in actors' experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors, and the decisions that such meetings produce. At the municipal level, there are differences in the use of specific types of meetings, which is reflected by the province's perspective. At the level of the regional authorities, there are substantive differences in the experienced value of routine meetings for coordinating retail issues.

Fit into the operationalisation of Hooghe and Marks (2001), it indeed seems that there are differences in the use and experienced value of meetings, at different governance levels, which might reflect the actors' willingness to 'streamline' interactions between governance levels with their behaviour (Prud'homme, 1995). From multi-level governance theory, it seems that in the first group, 'spatial' meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) have an additional layer. They provide for making administrative connections, and discussing matters with 'higher' governmental levels, which may both be considered networking elements between (and within) governmental levels (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). This is supported by the province's perception that these same meetings are meant for making municipal and provincial interests meet, and for making (regional) agreements. Interactions are important, and of a 'spatial nature', because they concern territorial policy decisions between actors of different levels (Piattoni, 2009). In both groups, the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) meetings have a decision-making function, but in the second group, this function is limited, as decision-making is limited to decisions on large-scale retail plans (Marks, 1996). At the level of the regional authorities, routine administrative meetings seem to have been considered increasingly more important and necessary for coordinating and discussing matters in the first group, than in the second group. They are considered of so much additional value, that one of their more 'divisive' tasks (checking municipalities' adherence to regional agreements), was 'separated' from these meetings in order to improve and 'streamline' coordination in these meetings. In other words, for these meetings it was considered that interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions) put too much pressure on interactions of a 'relational nature' (concerned with actors' responsibilities, relational positions, and relational integrity), and therefore the governance system was changed to improve coordination (the assessments were separated from the meetings) (Piattoni, 2009). In the second group, the considered additional value and necessity of frequent (retail) coordination meetings seems to be relatively low. Furthermore, in the first group, there are also additional factors related to multi-level governance which can be associated with meetings initiated by the sub-region's retail plan

assessment commission. These meetings seem to have been important for networking between municipalities, and improving their interactions of a 'relational nature' (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008; Piattoni, 2009). Next to that, these meetings made it easier for the commission to fulfil their 'new' role in the retail planning system, and to further 'establish' this role in the system (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). The meetings for the province's project of Samen Hart voor de Zaak (*Heart for the Business Together*) were considered qualitatively very good, and seem to have opened discussions. However, their considered additional value is unclear. They seem to have been aimed at creating awareness and finding solutions, but their contribution to interactions between different (governmental) levels remains unclear.

6.3 Municipal decision-making

6.3.1 Answering the third sub-question

The third sub-question was:

In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their municipal decision-making, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences, that influence the quality and implementation of local plans?

Here follows the answer to this sub-question, based on the results from chapter '5. Results'.

There were clear differences in factors related to municipal decision-making. One of these factors was the amount and type of disagreements between municipalities. In the first group, relatively more disagreements were experienced between municipalities, over retail plans or the adherence to regional agreements. In the second group, less disagreements were experienced. However, in both groups, this does not seem to be related to multi-level governance. In the first group, the higher amount of disagreements is attributed to developments like industry blurring and increased competition between municipalities. In the second group, the lower amount of disagreements is attributed to geographical circumstances, such as having concentrated retail areas with very local catchment areas. In the first group, regional authorities played a role in growing shared interests between municipalities, and building bonds of trust between them. However, there is one difference. In the first group, regional authorities did intervene sometimes, but not often. In the second group, regional authorities did not enforce municipalities' adherence to regional agreements. The province generally does not intervene.

A second factor was the perceived necessity by municipalities to develop, coordinate, or negotiate retail visions for larger regions. In both groups, regionally coordinating retail policies (visions) and retail plans is considered important. However, the perceived need for it is different among municipalities. In the first group, the experienced need for coordination seems high, while in the second group, the experienced need for coordination seems low. In the first group, motivations for coordination are 'proactive', such as: preventing sudden large-scale developments with negative impacts, and having knowledge of each others' developments. In the second group, motivations for coordination are 'reactive' to current developments, such as: perceiving alarming developments at peripheral locations, getting a grip on market forces (with negative impacts), and being able to coordinate matters, depending on the situation. For regional authorities, these

differences are largely reflected. In the first group, it is experienced that the need for coordination increased over the years because of disagreements between municipalities. However, at the regional level, motivations are both 'proactive' and 'reactive': addressing dynamism and researching (sectoral) developments, but also countering industry blurring and preventing that municipalities are 'played out' against each other (individually) by market actors. In the second group, it is experienced that retail planning is a local affair. No great need for regional coordination, or developing regional retail policies, seems to be experienced, except when it is necessary (for the prevention of large-scale retail developments at undesired or unsuitable locations). The province's experience mostly reflects the first group. In the province's experience, most municipalities perceive a shared interest to coordinate retail plans and policies, which was positively reinforced by local administrative cultures. The province considers regional coordination to be important, and actively stimulated regional coordination.

A third factor was the extent to which municipalities' operational decisions, and the arguments behind them, reflect the municipalities' current retail visions. In both groups, retail visions are used 'reactively' as an assessment framework for retail plans and changes in zoning plans. There is also a difference. In both groups, retail visions are also used 'proactively', but for different purposes in decision-making. In the first group, retail visions are used for decisions on the relocation of stores, and on which types of stores (or retail formulas) to attract to which retail areas. In the second group, retail visions are used for decisions on the reduction of (retail) planning overcapacity, and determining the borders of municipal retail structures. In the second group, internal 'intake commissions' are also more commonly used for assessing retail plans. Such commissions include civil servants from different policy fields (or departments) to make integral assessments, and thereby speed up the process. For regional authorities, aforementioned differences are largely reflected. Although in both groups retail visions are used as an assessment framework for retail plans, there is a difference in the regional authorities' enforcement. In the first group, when a large-scale retail plan would not adhere to (sub)regional agreements, the involved regional authorities might ask the involved municipality to uphold the law, and to seek a different location for the concerned retail plan. In the second group, regional authorities do not have an impact on municipalities' assessments of retail plans.

6.3.2 Comparative theoretical analysis and discussion

The actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders

Mostly at the municipal level, there were differences between both groups in the experienced amount and type of disagreements with other (governmental) actors.

Fit into the operationalisation of Smith (1997), the differences in the experienced amount and type of disagreements do not seem to have direct links to the displayed 'legitimacy' or leadership of the involved actors, because the disagreements have different causes (Smith, 1997). In the first group, the (relatively) higher number of disagreements is attributed to sectoral developments, like industry blurring and increased competition. The (relative) lack of disagreements in the second group is perceived to also have a 'geographical causes', like concentrated nature of retail areas and catchment areas being very local. The causes can not be related to aspects of multi-level governance, or such governance systems. However, in the first

group, the subjects of such disagreements often are regional coordination (on retail plans), or municipalities' adherence to regional agreements. It would seem that these disagreements concern an aspect of interactions of a 'spatial nature' between municipalities (concerned with territorial policy decisions), and also concern abiding the 'rules' of the governance system (Marks, 1996; Piattoni, 2009). The differences in these aspects might be partially explained by the differences in the role that regional authorities play, with regards to disagreements between municipalities. In the first group, regional authorities seem to be involved in 'streamlining' such behaviour, and building bonds of trust. But more importantly, regional authorities intervened sometimes in disagreements (although not often). In the second group, it is unclear if interventions happened, but it seems that regional authorities did not enforce municipalities' adherence to regional agreements. In addition to that, they put an emphasis on elaborating and solving matters at the local level (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008).

The perceived necessity by municipalities to make (or negotiate for) strategic retail plans for larger regions

At different levels, there were differences between both groups in the perceived necessity by municipalities to develop, coordinate, or negotiate strategic retail plans for larger regions. At the municipal level, there are no differences in the perceived importance of coordination, but there are indeed differences in the perceived need for coordination, and substantive differences in their motivations for coordination. At the level of the regional authorities, these differences are largely reflected, which also applies to the motivations. There is also a connection to the municipalities' experience of disagreements. The province's perspective seems to largely match the first group's perspective.

Fit into the operationalisation of Smith (1997), these differences indeed seem to concern differences in the perceived necessity to make strategic plans for larger regions. Since these same experienced differences in the necessity (and the motivations for it) also seem to be reflected at the level of regional authorities, it seems that negotiation does not have a larger impact on decision-making at 'higher' governance levels than at 'lower' governance levels (in this specific policy field). This is mentioned here, because the opposite might have been assumed based on the application of Smith's (1997) theory on decision-making. Although there are no differences at the municipal level in the perceived importance of regional coordination, there are differences in the perceived need for coordinating retail policies regionally. This seems to be relevant. In the first group, motivations for the need to coordinate seem to be more 'proactive' (aimed at preventing 'negative' developments), while in the second group, they seem more 'reactive' (responding to new 'negative' developments). This indeed indicates the unanimity of both groups in the perceived importance of coordination processes, as both respond to 'negative' developments (Peters & Pierre, 2001). But the differences in the 'proactive' and 'reactive' approaches also seem to indicate the differences in the need for coordination on policies, and thus in the need for interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions) or non-hierarchical interactions (Piattoni, 2009; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Interestingly, in the first group, at the level of the regional authorities, the need to coordinate seems to be connected to the amount of disagreements. The increased amount of disagreements seems to have heightened the perceived need for coordination. In other words, the amount of disagreements seems to be more or less coherent with the perceived need to coordinate (Smith, 1997). At the level of the regional authorities, the motivations to coordinate in the first group are both 'proactive' and

‘reactive’. They want to counter certain developments (which put pressure on already existing competition), but also want to research development to be able to make predictions. In the second group, the experienced need for coordination seems to be low, as retail planning is mostly considered a local affair. This seems to indicate the same differences as were present at the municipal level with regards to interactions of a ‘spatial nature’ (concerned with territorial policy decisions) and non-hierarchical interactions (Piattoni, 2009; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). The province considers coordination important (just as all municipalities in both groups do), and also seems to experience a need for it (just as the first group does at multiple governance levels). This seems to make the governance system for the first group more coherent with regards to motivations for coordination, as all actors in that governance system (municipalities, regional authorities, and the province) experience both the importance and the need for coordination (Piattoni, 2009). The province seems to have the impression that municipalities’ local administrative cultures may have contributed to municipalities’ perceived interest (and experienced need) for coordination. Overall, this need among municipalities is considered to be high nowadays.

The extent to which arguments behind operational decisions reflect the strategic plan

At different levels, there were also differences between both groups in the extent to which municipalities’ operational decisions (and the arguments behind them), were perceived to reflect the municipalities’ current strategic retail plans (visions). This mostly applies to differences in the way that strategic retail visions are used by municipalities. At the level of the regional authorities, there are differences in the way that (regional-level) strategic retail visions are used for enforcement.

Fit into the operationalisation of Faludi (1989), it indeed seems that it has been measured for municipalities to what extent their strategic retail plans (visions) have ‘facilitated decision-making’, and the impact that they have on ‘project plans’ (operational plans). Following Faludi’s (1989) theory, it seems that this might give an indication on how much ‘departure’ from the strategic retail plan has occurred, and thus might be an approximation of the strategic retail plan’s ‘performance’. At the municipal level, both groups use retail visions ‘proactively’, but for different purposes (in decision-making). In the first group, this often concerns attracting new stores and relocating existing stores, while in the second group, this often concerns determining the borders of retail structures, and deciding on the reduction of (retail) planning overcapacity. Although this might indicate a different perspective on the use of established retail visions, it does not seem to indicate a difference in decision-making between the two groups. There is also a difference in how municipalities approach assessing retail plans internally (using their retail vision). It seems that in the second group, internal ‘intake commissions’ are used more than in the first group (in order to make integral assessments, and speed up the process). This seems to be a minor difference in the structure of the governance system. It seems likely that this minor difference is not connected to multi-level governance, but to ‘differences in scale’. Internal ‘intake commissions’ were dominantly used in cities, as opposed to villages. Differences in scale, as a geographic component, might have an influence. Overall, city-municipalities often might have a larger organisation than village-municipalities, with more civil servants and larger departments. This might provide them with more possibilities to make organisational shifts, and experiment with new ‘governance solutions’ for assessing retail plans (or set up pilots for them), or different task distributions. However, this is a speculation, as there is no certainty on the causes for that. At the level of the regional authorities, there are differences in the approach from regional

authorities towards municipalities on adhering to (regionally established) agreements, although this is not necessarily related to municipalities' adherence of municipal retail visions. In the first group, it is mentioned that in cases of non-adherence to (regionally established) agreements, municipalities might be asked to uphold the law, while in the second group, regional authorities do not seem to have an influence on 'local' assessments. This difference does not entirely connect to the established indicator, but it does seem to indicate a difference in the coordination and negotiation of regional authorities with municipalities (Piattoni, 2009). In the first group, regional authorities seem to be more prepared to intervene with municipalities, or to steer or adjust, if considered necessary.

6.4 Quality and implementation of local plans

6.4.1 Answering the fourth sub-question

The fourth sub-question was:

In what way do the two groups of cases differ in their quality and implementation of local plans, and in factors that can be attributed to these differences?

Here follows the answer to this sub-question, based on the results from chapter '5. Results'.

There were clear differences in factors related to the quality and implementation of local plans. One of these factors was the extent to which the present local conditions and context were included in retail visions. For the first group, the need for actualisation is attributed to changes in societal developments. An emphasis is put on involving stakeholders in the process. For the second group, an emphasis is put on using research findings for actualisation. In the retail visions, there are no substantive differences in the inclusion of current retail structures or hierarchies, except for the first group additionally analysing the consumer base of different retail functions. There are also no substantive differences in the inclusion of local conditions. Within the first group, there are (mutual) differences in the scope of their spatial focus, while within the second group, there are (mutual) differences in the scope of incorporated factors. One minor difference, is that the first group uses local conditions to develop well-argued future perspectives. In the second group, local conditions put an emphasis on legal local plans or (development) opportunities. There are differences in the inclusion of current trends. The first group put an emphasis on national trends, while the second group highlighted both local and national trends (and legal changes). However, in the first group, the impact of trends is incorporated into future scenarios, which is not the case in the second group.

A second factor was the extent to which retail visions contain a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders (and improve commitment to plan goals). In the first group, it seems that retail visions are more 'reaching out' in involving different types of stakeholders (inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and retail property owners), while in the second group, only an emphasis is put on involving entrepreneurs. There is also a major difference. In the first group, retail visions are considered shared and supported stories, which need to be an invitation to actors. In the second group, it is considered not likely for retail visions to motivate stakeholders. This seems to be reflected by the retail visions and their narrative storylines. In the first group, next to being used

‘reactively’ (for retail plan assessment), the first group’s retail visions describe themselves as being used ‘proactively’ for the acquisition of companies, entrepreneurs, and investors. A leading role in this is reserved for the BIZ-regulation. In the second group, the retail visions do not seem to contain a clear storyline aimed specifically at motivating stakeholders. There are also differences in stakeholder involvement. In both groups stakeholders were important, were involved in the development of the retail visions themselves, and are considered important for reaching policy goals. However, in the first group stakeholders are explicitly also involved in the subsequent implementation process. In that implementation process, municipalities cooperate with stakeholders on: coordination, consultation, preservation, and marketing. In the second group, stakeholders are involved in clarifying local circumstances, but their implementation role seems to be unclear.

A third factor was the extent to which retail visions contain provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies. For both groups, it is not described in their retail visions how the coordination process with other (governmental) actors works. In the first group’s retail visions, the need for steering and a directional framework by other (governmental) actors are both expressed. In the second group’s retail visions, responsibilities for coordination between different (governmental) actors (and levels) are addressed. However, there are substantive differences in the retail visions’ provisions for coordination with existing policies. In the first group, retail visions do not seem to contain a policy framework of existing local (or regional) policies, plans, or regulations. In the second group, such policy frameworks are included. However, the impacts of these existing policies for the retail vision itself (or their connection to it), are not always made clear. There is one other difference. In the first group, ‘legal’ implementation instruments are described too, such as: zoning plans, industry regulations, private agreements, urban reallocation methods, centre management organisations, steering groups, project stimulation, rental price adjustments, and the BIZ-regulation. In the second group, it seems that such ‘legal’ implementation instruments are generally not included in their retail visions.

A fourth factor was the extent to which retail visions contain provisions to ensure a consistent implementation. In the first group it is not explicitly mentioned if the retail visions contain long-term goals, while in the second group the presence of long-term goals is mentioned to be the case. However, the retail visions of both groups do seem to contain long-term goals. In the first group’s retail visions, the policy goals are elaborated for different specific themes. It seems that in the second group, this thematic elaboration is not included. In the first group, retail visions also contain future perspectives or development directions, which are accompanied by future scenarios sometimes. In the second group, it seems that future perspectives (or scenarios) are not included. There are no substantive differences in the descriptions of responsibilities for implementation. A minor difference is that in the first group, there seem to be differences within the group in the level of depth of the described responsibilities for implementation. In the second group, the level of depth seems to be higher. In both groups, the (local) actors that are responsible for implementing tasks and measures are mentioned. There are also no substantive differences in the inclusion of a timescale for implementation. In both groups, retail visions generally do not include timescales for implementation. Overall, the first group seems inclined to use timescales, as one municipality has a ‘full’ timescale for all its action points, and another retail vision has an applied distinction between long-term and short-term (implementation) goals. In the second group, one municipality has a type of timescale, but this timescale does not seem to be entirely consistent in its time indications.

6.4.2 Comparative theoretical analysis and discussion

The extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in the strategic plan

At the municipal level, there were differences between both groups in the extent to which the present local conditions and context were included in their retail visions. There seem to be differences in the preferred source for actualisation for municipalities. There only seems to be a minor difference in the inclusion of current retail structures or hierarchies, but there seem to be no substantive differences in the inclusion of local conditions. However, there are minor differences in the inclusion of current trends, while there are also minor differences in the follow-up use of these current trends.

Fit into the operationalisation of Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), it indeed seems that there are differences in communication-oriented 'performance' aspects of retail visions. More specifically, this seems to concern 'dimensions that aim to describe the local context' (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019).

The extent to which the strategic plan contains a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and to improve commitment to plan goals

At the municipal level, there were also differences between both groups in the extent to which their retail visions contain a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders (and improve commitment to plan goals). There seem to be differences in their attitudes towards involving stakeholders, while there also seem to be substantive differences in their perception on the need for a retail vision to contain a motivating (narrative) storyline for stakeholders. These same differences seem to be reflected by their retail visions. The retail visions also seemed to have differences on the role of stakeholders in implementation.

Fit into the operationalisation of Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), the differences in the retail visions seem to include certain communication-oriented aspects. In the words of Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), these differences seem to certainly include differences on "[...] *whether they entail a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and improve their commitment towards the goals of the plans [...]*" (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 882).

The extent to which the strategic plan includes provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies

At the municipal level, there were also differences between both groups in the extent to which their retail visions contain provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors, or existing policies. With regards to coordination of retail visions with existing policies, there are differences in the inclusion of a 'policy framework' of existing local (and regional) policies in the retail visions, between the two groups. Besides, there also seem to be differences in the inclusion of overviews of 'legal' implementation instruments. However, both differences do not seem to fully match.

Fit into the operationalisation of Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), the mentioned differences in the inclusion of policy frameworks and 'legal' instrument overviews seem to fit well into the plan quality measurement dimension that they use: "*Provisions regarding to which plan's policies should be coordinated with other plans or agencies [...]*" (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019, p. 885).

The extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale)

At the municipal level, there were also differences between both groups in the extent to which their retail visions contain provisions to ensure consistent implementation. There do not seem to be differences in the extent to which retail visions contain long-term goals, but there indeed seem to be differences in the thematic elaborations of these long-term goals. There are also differences in the inclusion of future perspectives (or scenarios), connected to these long-term goals. Next to that, there seems to be a minor difference in the description of responsibilities for implementation, namely in the level of depth. However, in both groups the responsibilities for implementation are included. Finally, there seem to be no substantive differences in the retail visions on the inclusion of a timescale for implementation, although there seem to be inconsistencies in this factor.

Fit into the operationalisation of Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019), the mentioned (minor) differences related to the inclusion of long-term goals and the description of responsibilities for implementation, seem to be reflected in Rudolf and Grădinaru's (2019) framework of assessing a retail vision's quality, which includes a description of clear long-term goals in the retail visions. Next to that, it also includes a precise description of responsibilities for the implementation of the policies (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019).

7. Conclusions

In this chapter the main research question is answered. This concerns the first part of this chapter. The second part of this chapter concerns both the practical and the theoretical recommendations. The last part of this chapter concerns the reflection.

7.1 Answering the main research question

The answer to the main research question is directly based on the comparative analysis from the previous chapter, chapter '6. *Comparative analysis*'. The answer to the main research question is therefore not directly based on the answers to the sub-questions. As is also explained in the previous chapter, the answers to the sub-questions have first been compared to the operationalisation and theoretical framework, and have been interpreted within that context. This decision has been made in order to make the conducted research and its research process more focused. More importantly, this decision was also made to make the conclusion more theoretically grounded, and thereby also to make the answer to the main research question more theoretically grounded. It is considered that within the context of this research, the chosen thesis structure and process structure provide for more theoretical reflection. It is assumed that this theoretical reflection provides additional depth to the final conclusions of this research. The sub-questions still have an important purpose and function in answering the main research question, but in a methodologically different way. They serve as methodological 'tools' for collecting, organising and focusing the parts of information that are necessary for the theoretical comparison and reflection.

On the basis of aforementioned comparative analysis (in chapter '6. *Comparative analysis*'), in which the answers to the sub-questions were compared with the operationalisation and theoretical framework of this research, the main research question can be answered. The main research question is:

In what ways might multi-level governance influence the effectiveness of the retail planning of municipalities in the Netherlands?

The short answer is that it does indeed seem to be the case that there are ways in which multi-level governance (and differences in it) can influence the effectiveness of retail planning in municipalities. These influences can include different factors connected to the decentralisation of retail planning competencies, the quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors, but can also concern factors in municipal decision-making. Within these dimensions, there were also factors that were not relevant within the context of this research. In chapter '5. *Results*', these factors have been designated as non-relevant indicators, and there it is also made clear why they were not perceived to be relevant within the context of this research. In its full scope, the main research question can be answered most effectively and most efficiently by addressing its different dimensions from the theoretical framework (and the sub-questions).

First dimension: differences in the decentralisation of retail planning competencies

Using the 'multi-level governance' approach, it seems that there are certain differences in the decentralisation of retail planning competencies that contribute to a noticeable difference in the involved governance system.

- **Actors' arguments to be involved in retail planning**

The first differences concern the actors' arguments to be involved in retail planning. For municipalities, a limitation in the motivations to be involved in retail planning to only 'specific cases' (peripheral or large-scale cases), contributes to a lower level of multi-level governance characteristics. For regional authorities, a higher number of motivations to be involved in retail planning contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance. This also applies to a higher number of differences in these motivations (a larger variety of different motivations). For the province, the differences can not be substantiated. The province's motivation to be involved in retail planning applies equally to all municipalities.

- **Experienced external influences on municipalities' retail planning**

The second differences concern the number of regional authorities having an influence on municipalities' retail planning, and also the range of this influence. For municipalities, a higher influence of inter-municipal (regional) coordination on municipalities' retail policies, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as this concerns interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions). An increased 'obligatory nature' for coordinating large-scale retail plans with other municipalities contributes to a lower level of multi-level governance, as it increases the governance system's dependence on hierarchy. For regional authorities, a higher amount of influences (and more different types of influences) on municipalities' retail planning, contribute to a higher level of multi-level governance, if such influences contribute to improving the coordination process itself. A (sub)regional retail plan assessment commission can accelerate this effect. For the province, the level of multi-level governance (based on its influence on municipalities' retail planning) can not be entirely substantiated. Municipalities have the perception that the province can hold back undesired developments, while the province does not share this perception. In practice, the province will generally not intervene locally. The province's assessment of retail plans has an influence on municipalities' retail planning in general, but this is an influence that seems to be equal for all municipalities. Thus for the province, the influence on municipalities' retail planning is of a limited nature. It is also uncertain if this influence contributes to a higher (or lower) level of multi-level governance.

- **Actors' experienced control over policy content**

The third differences concern the actors' experienced control over policy content. For municipalities, the establishment of measures (or policies) by municipalities to prevent non-adherence of regional retail policies and agreements (with additional consequences), contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as such measures concern additional coordination (and networking) between different governmental levels of a 'spatial nature' (as the measures are concerned with territorial policy decisions). For regional authorities, transferring the responsibilities for assessing large-scale retail plans from a higher level of government to a (sub)regional authority contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, because this concerns (simultaneous) changes in

decentralisation, decision-making, roles, and policy competencies. Connected to that, establishing decisions from regional authorities (or their retail plan assessment commissions) to be 'binding decisions', contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance as it changes the governance system itself, and its 'rules': the enforcement of decision-making 'rules' is decentralised to a lower administrative level. Also, for regional authorities, an increase in regional authorities' advice ending up in municipalities' retail policies contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as this concerns a non-hierarchical exchange. For the province, being 'pragmatic' in the choice of a coordination level for retail plans and policies for municipalities contributes to a higher level in multi-level governance, because that perspective allows for a change of the governance system; it is asserted that the coordination level should never be an obstacle to inviting relevant actors to the 'negotiation table'. Next to that, being 'pragmatic' in the choice of a coordination level for retail plans and policies for municipalities also allows for decentralising negotiations about particular (retail) issues to lower administrative levels. The province's assessment of retail plans by its retail plan assessment commission had an influence on many retail plans, but did not have a specific influence on municipalities' retail policies.

Second dimension: differences in quality of power relationships between (governmental) actors

Using the 'multi-level governance' approach, it seems that there are certain differences in the quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors that contribute to a noticeable difference in the involved governance system.

- **Actors' experience of a hierarchy in their formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors**

The first differences concern the actors' experience of a hierarchy in their formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors. For municipalities, the minor differences in their experience of a hierarchy do not seem to contribute to a higher (or lower) level of multi-level governance, because they seem to be largely caused by geographical circumstances. It is uncertain to what extent these geographical circumstances contribute to differences in multi-level governance for these cases. For regional authorities, an increased 'strictness' in frameworks that determine the possibilities for municipalities, as well as an increased 'strictness' in the enforcement of municipalities' adherence to regional agreements, both contribute to a higher level of multi-level governance. This is because both cause the governance system's 'formal' hierarchy and set of 'rules' on decision-making, to interact with the governance system itself. It also causes interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions). For the province, a decrease in the more hierarchical role that they may have had in the past, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance because it changed the province's 'intervention possibilities' (and thus its policy competencies), and also its role in decision-making. In the interaction between different (governmental) levels, this role change provided for more independence, and for an increased importance of networking.

- **Actors' roles in their translation of 'higher-level' retail visions to local spatial policy (or their help or support therein)**

The second differences concern the actors' roles in their translation of 'higher-level' retail visions to local spatial policy (or their help or support therein). For regional authorities, a higher amount of roles, a wider range of roles, or taking-up additional roles in their policy field, contribute to a higher-level of multi-level governance. This mostly applies when these roles aim to improve networking or coordination between different levels, or if these roles can be considered 'proactive' (for example by leading new policy developments, initiating research into sectoral problems, or by providing unsolicited advice). Such roles are often not concerned with changing the 'rules' for decision-making, or with interventions. A (sub)regional retail plan assessment commission that takes up such roles can accelerate this effect. Also, for regional authorities, a larger involvement in strengthening and developing non-hierarchical exchanges between different (governmental) levels (such as with the province), contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance. For the province, an increased perception among municipalities and regional authorities on the (different ways of) 'proactiveness' in the province's role contributes to a higher level in multi-level governance, as such roles involve 'connecting' different municipalities. The role of the province's retail plan assessment commission is equal for all municipalities.

- **Actors' experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors, and the decisions that such meetings produce**

The third differences concern the actors' experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce. For municipalities and the province, increasing the scope of 'spatial' meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) with an additional layer contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, if this additional functionality provides for making administrative connections and discussing matters with 'higher' governmental levels, as this concerns networking between (governmental) levels. This can lead to interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions). Furthermore, expanding the possibilities for decision-making on retail plans in these 'spatial' Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) meetings, and not limiting decision-making to 'obligatory' cases, also contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, because it changes the 'rules' on decision-making in the governance system. For regional authorities, a higher perceived importance, additional value, and necessity of having routine administrative meetings to discuss retail matters, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, because it contributes to improving the coordination process between different (governmental) levels. This applies especially if regional authorities also act accordingly by initiating policies to do exactly that. As a corollary thereof, separating 'divisive' tasks (such as assessing municipalities' retail plans) from administrative meetings to improve the 'coordinating' task of those meetings, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, because it aims to 'streamline' and improve coordination between different (governmental) levels. The interactions on this 'divisive' task are of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions), and would otherwise put pressure on the interactions of a 'relational nature' (concerned with actors' responsibilities, relational positions, and relational

integrity). Separating them might partly decrease this pressure, and thus it seems to contribute to improving the governance system (and the decision-making of a 'spatial nature'). Naturally, the contribution to the governance system is greater if the 'divisive' task is 'picked up' again by another institution. Also, start-up meetings from a (sub)regional retail plan assessment commission can contribute to a higher level of multi-level governance, if these meetings aim to improve networking between municipalities, and thus interactions of a 'relational nature' (concerned with actors' responsibilities, relational positions, and relational integrity). Such meetings can also contribute to accelerating the change of the governance system, by 'establishing' new roles for different actors much faster. For the province, based on its project of *Samen Hart voor de Zaaik* (*Heart for the Business Together*), the project's contribution to a higher (or lower) level of multi-level governance can not be substantiated. This is because it remains unclear in what ways the project's meetings might have contributed to interactions between different (governmental) levels.

Third dimension: differences in municipal decision-making

Using the 'multi-level governance' approach, and through placing municipal decision-making within that approach by analysing both of its factors (leadership legitimacy and the inclusion of strategic plans into decision-making) into the 'multi-level governance' approach, it seems that there are certain differences in municipal decision-making that contribute to a noticeable difference in the involved governance system.

- **Actors' experienced amount and type of disagreements with other (governmental) actors**

The first differences concern the actors' experienced amount and type of disagreements with other (governmental) actors. For municipalities, an increase in the amount of disagreements (and in the different types of disagreements) contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, if the subject of such disagreements is regional coordination on retail plans or policies. But this only seems to apply if the involved regional authorities have changed their roles to sufficiently address these disagreements: for example, if they are involved in 'streamlining' interactions between municipalities, building bonds of trust between municipalities (networking), or if they intervene sometimes in municipalities' disagreements. It seems that the 'rules' of the governance system leave room for these (small) interventions and adjustments, if regional authorities have established the 'base' for this possible directing (and intervening) role by making municipalities' adherence to regional agreements obligatory. Thus, if there is coherence between the municipality's role and the regional authority's role in this respect, then this contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance. Despite of that, these types of differences do not seem to be a good indicator for 'leadership legitimacy', because the direct causes for disagreements between municipalities are often described as (local) differences in sectoral developments, increased overall competition between municipalities, and (local) 'geographical causes'. This means that often municipalities do not really perceive other municipalities' leadership to be the cause of the disagreement; instead, external

circumstances stimulated them to make other decisions than other municipalities, which led to a situation of disagreement.

- **Municipalities' perceived necessity to develop, coordinate, or negotiate strategic retail plans for larger regions**

The second differences concern the perceived necessity by municipalities to develop, coordinate, or negotiate strategic retail plans for larger regions. For municipalities, there are no differences in the perceived importance of coordinating strategic retail plans for larger regions regionally. However, for municipalities, a higher perceived need for coordinating strategic retail plans for larger regions regionally, or the motivations for this need being more 'proactive', contribute to a higher level of multi-level governance. Both indicate that the need for coordination between different (governmental) actors is higher within policy development. Next to that, both indicate the perceived need for interactions of a 'spatial nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions) and non-hierarchical interactions. For regional authorities, the perceived need for coordinating strategic retail plans for larger regions regionally has a connection to the amount of disagreements between (governmental) actors. A higher amount of disagreements between (governmental) actors, contributes to a higher perceived need for coordinating strategic retail plans for larger regions regionally. Next to that, an increased motivation to coordinate strategic retail plans for larger regions, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as aforementioned needs are reflected by the aim to engage in interactions of a 'spatial nature' nature' (concerned with territorial policy decisions). Motivations may be 'proactive' (through initiating actions or policies), or 'reactive' (through reacting to certain developments). For the province, a higher perceived need to coordinate strategic retail plans for larger regions, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as this would concern a case of the multi-level governance system reinforcing itself, which is a core characteristic of multi-level governance systems. If the interests and motivations for the coordination of these strategic plans are shared by all involved (governmental) levels for a particular area, it seems to be the case that this provides opportunities for changing towards more effective distributions of roles, 'rules', and decision-making, to reach (shared) goals. However, for this it seems to be important that lower (governmental) levels share these same interests and motivations.

- **The extent to which municipalities' operational decisions, and the arguments behind them, were perceived to reflect the municipalities' current strategic retail plans**

The third differences concern the extent to which municipalities' operational decisions, and the arguments behind them, were perceived to reflect the municipalities' current strategic retail plans. For municipalities, there are no substantive differences that contribute to a higher (or lower) level in multi-level governance. All municipalities are generally 'proactive' in using their established retail vision for decision-making, but just in different ways. Existing differences do not indicate a difference in their 'rules' or systems for decision-making. Just in the same way, differences in the use of internal 'intake commissions' by municipalities for assessing retail plans locally, do not seem to contribute to a different level of multi-level governance. Although such internal 'intake commissions' indeed concern a (small) change in the municipality's governance structure, such changes seem to be related to differences in scale, or geographic factors. It seems that the difference in the use of internal 'intake commissions' can mostly be attributed to

differences between cities and villages. For regional authorities, a more 'proactive' approach in stimulating municipalities' adherence to regional agreements, contributes to a higher level of multi-level governance, as it indicates a 'proactive' approach from regional authorities towards coordinating and negotiating with municipalities within the established governance system. Here it is important to mention that a 'proactive' approach does not necessarily equate to intervening, but can, for example, also concern asking another (governmental) actor to uphold the law.

Fourth dimension: differences in the quality and implementation of local plans

From the perspective of retail planning, it seems that there are differences in multi-level governance that contribute to noticeable differences in the quality of local plans, and through that contribute to noticeable differences in the effectiveness of municipal retail planning.

- **The extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in municipalities' retail visions**

The first differences concern the extent to which the present local conditions and context were included in municipalities' retail visions. For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to differences in these municipalities' preferences. In this way, it might contribute to increasing municipalities' preference to use (local) stakeholders as their primary source for actualising their retail visions, instead of (local) research data. For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might also contribute to differences in municipalities' retail visions. In this way, a higher level of multi-level governance might also contribute to municipalities including an additional analysis of the consumer base for the different retail functions into their retail visions. Next to that, it might also contribute to municipalities including 'future perspectives' in their retail visions, and developing these on the basis of local conditions. There also seem to be differences specific for lower levels of multi-level governance. A (relative) absence of multi-level governance might contribute to municipalities including a larger scope of current trends (at different spatial levels) in their retail visions. Next to that, a (relative) absence of multi-level governance might also contribute to an increased emphasis on 'legal' local plans and development opportunities in the included 'local conditions' of retail visions. Between the retail visions, there were no substantive differences in the inclusion of current retail structures or hierarchies, while there were also no substantive differences in the inclusion of local conditions.

- **Extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders (and improve commitment to plan goals)**

The second differences concern the extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders (and improve commitment to plan goals). For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to differences in these municipalities' perceptions. In this way, it might contribute to strengthening municipalities' intentions to 'reach out' and involve more local stakeholders (and more different types of them). Next to that, it might also contribute to retail visions being considered shared and supported stories, and invitations to actors, by municipalities. For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might also contribute to

differences in these municipalities' retail visions. In this way, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to increasing municipalities' retail visions' inclusion of ways to 'proactively' attract new stakeholders, such as companies, entrepreneurs, or investors. In addition to that, it might contribute to the development and inclusion of a storyline for that specific purpose in the retail vision, aimed at motivating stakeholders. Furthermore, it might increase municipalities' willingness to involve stakeholders in the implementation of the retail vision, to designate a role for them in this implementation process, and to include both of these matters in their retail visions. Between the retail visions, there were no substantive differences in the considered importance of involving stakeholders (in general). Overall, stakeholders were described to be involved in the development of retail visions themselves, and also to be important for reaching certain policy goals.

- **Extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors, or existing policies**

The third differences concern the extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors, or existing policies. For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to differences in these municipalities' retail visions. In this way, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to municipalities' retail visions' inclusion of an expression on the need for steering and a directional framework for (and by) other (governmental) actors. The other way around, a (relative) absence of multi-level governance might contribute to municipalities' retail visions' inclusion of the designated responsibilities for different (governmental) actors within the coordination process (although not the coordination process itself). There seem to be more differences specific for lower levels of multi-level governance. A (relative) absence of multi-level governance might contribute to the inclusion of policy frameworks in municipalities' retail visions (on existing policies). However, this does not equate to policy frameworks being 'connected' to the retail vision itself, as such a possible connection was not shown. The relationship between the existing policies and the retail vision itself might also not necessarily be addressed. The other way around, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to the inclusion of 'legal' implementation instruments into municipalities' retail visions, such as zoning plans, industry regulations, private agreements, urban reallocation measures, and rental price adjustments, among others. Between the retail visions there were no substantive differences in the inclusion of a description on how the coordination with other (governmental) actors works, because generally, this was not addressed in most in retail visions.

- **Extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale)**

The fourth differences concern the extent to which municipalities' retail visions contain provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale). Between the retail visions, there were no substantive differences in the inclusion of clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale. Overall, the retail visions do indeed contain long-term goals. Next to that, the (local) actors that are responsible for implementing tasks and measures are mentioned. But the retail visions do generally not

contain a 'full' timescale for implementation. However, it is important to consider that there are indeed minor differences in the inclusion of provisions for ensuring a consistent implementation that might be relevant. For municipalities, a higher level of multi-level governance might contribute to an increase in the elaboration of different specific themes, as an addition to the 'regular' description of policy goals. Next to that, it might contribute to the inclusion of 'future perspectives' or development directions in municipalities' retail visions, possibly accompanied by future scenarios. Furthermore, it might contribute to including indications of a timescale (perception) for implementation into municipalities' retail visions, such as clear distinctions between long-term goals and short-term goals. There also seems to be one (minor) difference specific for lower levels of multi-level governance. A (relative) absence of multi-level governance might contribute to a higher level of depth within the description of responsibilities for implementation, which are included in the municipalities' retail visions.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Practical recommendations

Implications for all practical recommendations

Because of the selected methodology, and this research being a comparative casestudy of an exploratory nature, there are consequences for the overall generalizability. As is typical for qualitative research, the researched concepts are studied in their 'natural state' and circumstances. The amount of investigated concepts is low, but the depth of the investigation is high (Creswell, 2007). These characteristics, and most notably the research being an exploratory casestudy, decrease the generalizability of the conclusions (Yin, 2018). The conclusions may not be presumed to be applicable to cases other than the studied cases. That means that practical recommendations based on these conclusions might also not be relevant for application to other municipalities, regional authorities (sub-regions and regions), or provinces, than the selected ones. The conclusions may not necessarily apply to them. Perspectives, opinions, results, lessons, ideas, solutions or generalisations may have been relevant only for the specific cases that were researched. Therefore it is mentioned that these practical recommendations should only be considered at the reader's own discretion, regardless of the context or situation, the intended purpose, the content of the recommendation, or the case involved.

Recommendations for municipalities' retail planning and policy development

For municipalities, it may be important to consider if multi-level governance should be pursued or not as a 'mode of governance'. The conclusions seem to point in the direction that potential influences of multi-level governance on municipalities' retail planning were mostly positive. It might contribute to municipalities including the following matters into their retail visions: (1) additional consumer base analyses for retail functions; (2) 'future perspectives' based on the local conditions (with possible future scenarios); (3) ways to 'proactively' attract new companies, entrepreneurs, or investors (stakeholders); (4) storylines aimed at motivating stakeholders; (5) designations on the roles of stakeholders (and their involvement) in the implementation process; (6) expressions on the need for steering and a directional framework by other (governmental) actors; (7) 'legal' implementation instruments; (8) elaborations on specific themes as an addition

to 'regular' policy goal descriptions; (9) indications of a timescale (perception) for implementation. Next to those possible contributions for retail visions, it might also contribute to improving municipalities' perspectives on: (1) including local stakeholders for actualising retail visions; (2) 'reaching out' and involving more different types of stakeholders; (3) improving the perception that retail visions are shared and supported stories, and simultaneously improving the willingness to involve stakeholders in the implementation process (and provide them with a clearly designated role).

However, it seems that the (relative) absence of multi-level governance can also have certain positive characteristics. But overall, the conclusions do mostly point in the direction that a presence of multi-level governance might contribute to more positive governance characteristics and results, than the (relative) absence of it would. Still, the possible negative influences should be paid attention to by the municipalities that aim to improve or increase their level of multi-level governance, or their local retail planning governance system. If municipalities implemented measures for that purpose, it is advised that they pay additional attention to: (1) using research data for the actualisation of their retail visions (in addition to using local stakeholders); (2) including a (sufficiently large enough) scope of the current local trends in their retail visions, possibly for different spatial levels; (3) including 'legal' local plans (such as zoning plans) and development opportunities, in the 'local conditions' chapters of their retail visions; (4) including overviews in their retail visions of responsibilities for different governmental actors within the regional coordination process; (5) including policy frameworks in their retail visions on the (relevant) existing policies; (6) reaching a sufficient level of depth in their retail visions in the description of stakeholders' responsibilities for implementation.

Recommendations for municipalities' governance

The conclusions point in the direction that the potential influences of multi-level governance might mostly be considered positive. Therefore, here follow practical recommendations on what municipalities might do to increase their level of multi-level governance. For achieving this, municipalities might: (1) improve motivations that coordination is useful beyond the 'obligatory' coordination on large-scale retail (plans); (2) decrease the emphasis on the 'obligatory nature' of the coordination of large-scale retail plans; (3) take negotiation with other municipalities about your retail policies into account to a higher degree; (4) establish measures (or policies) to prevent non-adherence by municipalities to regional agreements, with possible consequences; (5) increase the scope of the 'spatial' meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) with an additional layer for making administrative connections, and networking; (6) expand the decision-making possibilities for retail plans in the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) beyond the 'obligatory' cases; (7) admit disagreements with other municipalities, and seek to solve them through coordination (under the condition that the involved regional authority has an adequate role to sufficiently address such disagreements); (8) improve the perceptions and 'proactive' motivations on coordination, especially on the usefulness of coordination for regional retail policies.

Recommendations for regional authorities' governance (and for specialised commissions)

The conclusions point in the direction that the potential influences of multi-level governance might mostly be considered positive. Therefore, here follow practical recommendations on what regional authorities (either regions or sub-regions) might do to increase the level of multi-level

governance. For achieving this, regional authorities might: (1) increase the amount (and different types of) motivations to be involved in retail planning, if such motivations aim to improve the coordination process; (2) increase the amount (and different types of) influences on municipalities' retail planning, if such influences aim to improve the coordination process; (3) transfer responsibilities for assessing large-scale retail plans to sub-regions (which only applies for regions); (4) establish decisions from regional authorities to be 'binding decisions'; (5) increase the 'strictness' and clarity in frameworks that determine the possibilities for municipalities; (6) increase the 'strictness' in enforcing municipalities' adherence to regional agreements; (7) increase the amount, scope, and 'taking-up' of additional roles in the policy field of retail planning, if such roles either improve networking or coordination between different levels, or if such roles may be considered 'proactive'; (8) improve the regional authorities' perceptions on the importance, additional value, and necessity of having routine administrative meetings to discuss retail matters; (9) implement measures (or policies) for aforementioned purpose, such as, for example, the separation of 'divisive' tasks (assessing municipalities' retail plans) from administrative coordination meetings; (10) enlarge the involvement in strengthening and developing non-hierarchical exchanges between different levels; (11) establish the 'base' for new directing (and intervention) roles by making municipalities' adherence to regional agreements obligatory; (12) take up the role to address disagreements between municipalities, and support this by becoming involved in 'streamlining' interactions, building bonds of trusts between municipalities, and by intervening in disagreements sometimes; (13) increase the motivations for regional authorities' to coordinate strategic retail plans for larger regions, which may be either 'proactive' (through initiating actions or policies) or 'reactive' (through reacting to certain developments); (14) aim for a 'proactive' approach in stimulating municipalities' adherence to regional agreements (such as by asking municipalities to uphold the law), if intervention may be prevented. Although no clear recommendations may be formulated based on the following factor, it might contribute if regional authorities aim to increase the amount of advice from regional authorities that ends up in municipalities' retail policies. It also should be noted that a higher amount of disagreements between municipalities might not necessarily be very negative for the regional governance structure; the real differences seem to be in how such disagreements are addressed.

Based on the conclusions, there are also recommendations to be made specifically for regional authorities' retail plan assessment commissions (if such a commission has been established). These recommendations are addressed here separately. First, for achieving a higher level of multi-level governance, establishing a regional authority's retail plan assessment commission might accelerate the increase in the amount of (and different types of) influences from regional authorities on municipalities' retail planning, if such influences aim to improve the coordination process. Second, for achieving a higher level of multi-level governance, a regional authority's (existing) retail plan assessment commission itself might: (1) establish decisions from retail plan assessment commissions to be 'binding decisions'; (2) 'take up' of additional roles in the policy field of retail planning, if such roles either improve networking or coordination between different levels, or may be considered 'proactive' (such as providing different types of advice, or initiating research, among other things). This might accelerate the effect caused by similar roles being 'took up' by the regional authorities themselves; (3) establish and organise meetings with municipalities from the perspective of the retail plan assessment commission, which might help to

institutionalise and legitimise the commission's new roles. This might work best if such meetings aim to improve networking between municipalities.

Recommendations for provinces' governance

The conclusions point in the direction that the potential influences of multi-level governance might mostly be considered positive. Therefore, here follow practical recommendations on what provinces might do to increase the level of multi-level governance. For achieving this, provinces might: (1) create the 'institutional room' for regional authorities (and their retail plan assessment commissions) to implement aforementioned recommendations and changes, or to make these possible. Especially roles in decision-making and networking might be important. If a retail plan assessment commission does not exist yet, allowing the establishment of such a commission is recommended, especially for sub-regions. It is also recommended, as a province, to pay attention to how policy competencies may be transferred to such commissions most effectively; (2) be 'pragmatic' in the choice for a coordination level for retail plans and policies for municipalities. Let it not be an obstacle to inviting relevant actors to the 'negotiation table'; (3) decrease the possible hierarchical role in retail planning (if this has existed historically), and aim to decrease other actors' perception of such a hierarchical role. Limit the use of certain 'intervention possibilities' that might historically still exist, if replacement solutions are within reach; (4) make the province's role more 'proactive', especially concerning 'connecting' different municipalities; (5) increase the scope of the 'spatial' meetings of the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) with an additional layer for making administrative connections, and networking; (6) expand the decision-making possibilities for retail plans in the Regionaal Ruimtelijk Overleg (RRO) (*Regional Spatial Consultation*) beyond the 'obligatory' cases; (7) improve the perceptions on the need to coordinate strategic retail policies for larger regions. If positive perceptions on that need are shared by more different levels of government (which are simultaneously involved in the retail planning of one particular geographic area), this might have a strong influence.

7.2.2 Theoretical recommendations

Possibilities for further development of theory

In his study on retail planning, van der Krabben (2009) concluded that both the uncertainty on the 'rules' and the absence of legal powers for regional authorities might hold back effective collaborative retail planning. The results of this particular study support his findings. Firstly, the results of this study do indeed show that the presence of decision-making 'rules' and legal powers (especially for regional authorities) can improve the governance systems of retail planning. Such 'rules' and legal powers, part of a wider set of factors, increase the governance system's level of multi-level governance, and thereby seem to improve it.

Secondly, the results of this study show that besides 'rules' and legal powers, there are additional factors that can be added to van der Krabben's (2009) theory, that can also improve governance systems in retail planning, and that fit in a 'multi-level governance' approach. Examples of these factors are the increasing of the 'networking capacity' of spatial administrative meetings, and the establishment new (proactive) roles for regional authorities and their specialised commissions. In addition to this, many other factors were identified as well. These can all be found in the conclusions, in chapter '7.1 Answering the main research question'.

Thirdly, the results of this study also show that the presence of the factors from van der Krabben's (2009) research ('rules' and legal powers), contributes to the (practical) effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning. The results (and conclusions) illustrate that in the specific group of cases where these factors were present, multiple additional 'positive' elements were identified in municipalities' retail visions. Most of these elements seem to have improved the plan quality of municipalities' retail visions, and thereby seem to have improved the effectiveness of their retail planning.

Fourthly, since van der Krabben's (2009) research was conducted in 2009, it remained unclear to what extent the new retail planning system had yet enabled collaborative planning in the current time, when this particular study was conducted (2020-2021). The conclusions of this study indicate that there are indeed many possibilities for improving governance systems in retail planning. The conclusions seem to indicate that it is possible to change governance systems in such a way that improvements can be realised in both coordination processes, in spatial planning practice (through agreements, policies, and plan assessments), and in many other factors as well. It is therefore considered that under certain conditions, which are specified in detail in the conclusions in chapter '*7.1 Answering the main research question*', collaborative planning is possible within the new retail planning system.

Recommendations for research directions

However, there are still aspects that are not entirely clear yet. These aspects may lead to new research, or may provide new directions for future research. It needs to be considered that the current methodology and research design may have had their limitations, which leaves open new possibilities. Firstly, future research could be conducted specifically on the influence of the Nota Ruimte (from 2004) on the relationships of municipalities with other governmental actors (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). The indicator associated with the impact of the Nota Ruimte was designated as a non-relevant indicator in chapter '*5.2 Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors*'. It was considered to be non-relevant because the indicator proved to be immeasurable within the scope of this research; the respondents' answers did not suffice to establish a relevant contribution to measuring the associated theoretical concept. Among respondents, there were different factors that may have caused them to have a (relatively) limited knowledge of this indicator, which made it difficult for them to assess its impact. According to the respondents: (1) many changes and developments happened simultaneously in the policy field of retail planning around the year of 2004, also at different governance levels. Different developments happening simultaneously made it difficult to demarcate the specific changes that were caused by one specific policy change (the Nota Ruimte); (2) the Nota Ruimte itself had a wide scope in the aspects that it addressed, which makes it even more difficult to demarcate different aspects of it. This also applies to the impact of these aspects on relationships between other governmental actors. This seemed to be confirmed by the respondents that were more knowledgeable on the policy change associated with the Nota Ruimte (in 2004); (3) in the period between 2004 and the present (2020-2021), many 'new' changes have happened to the Dutch retail planning system. Overall, it seems that the impact of more recent policy changes was better remembered by respondents. In a policy field with many (relatively fast) policy changes, the Nota Ruimte from 2004 may be considered a (relatively) old policy change, despite its large impact at the time. Although these factors may have decreased the indicator's value for this research, this does not mean that the indicator is not relevant at all:

it just means that the indicator in its current shape did not fit within the methodological scope of this research. This seems to be confirmed by the results. Some respondents mentioned that it is very likely that the Nota Ruimte may indeed have caused changes to municipalities' relationships with other governmental actors. For future research, the change in municipalities' relationships with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors because of the Nota Ruimte could be studied in-depth. This would provide a contribution to the study by Smith (1997), who mentioned that it is important to compare relationships between different governance levels before and after major reforms in a policy field. Such a study might be conducted by interviewing policy experts or policy-makers that were involved with developing or implementing the original regulation. Potentially, historical research could uncover additional components or influences of this regulation, which would contribute to understanding its impact.

Secondly, future research could be conducted to separately investigate the influence of retail plan assessment commissions more in-depth. In this research only one example of such a (sub-regional) commission was studied at the level of regional authorities: the Regionale Adviecommissie Detailhandel (*Regional Advisory Commission Retail*), from the sub-region of Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven (Stedelijk Gebied Eindhoven, 2019b). Beforehand, there were indications that such retail plan assessment commissions possibly had a major role to play in the 'new' regional governance structures by being entrusted with responsibilities, and by becoming (both legally and practically) important for the assessment and approval of retail plans, for both municipalities and private stakeholders (Krabben, 2009). From the conclusions of the current study, this also seemed to have applied to the specific retail plan assessment commission that was studied within this research. It seems that retail plan assessment commissions can indeed become more institutionalised (to a great extent), and it also seems to be the case that they can have an influence on retail planning if they are entrusted with a more elaborated role. An important part of this study's recommendations concern such retail plan assessment commissions. Based on the results, this poses the question: to what extent are retail plan assessment commissions an 'integral' part of a regional authorities' governance structures (in retail planning)? Researching this question could make it clear if such developments in the Netherlands are part of a (possibly temporary) policy trend, or if they concern a 'larger' new direction in retail planning policy. Different provinces and regional authorities now have such commissions (Krabben, 2009; Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017). This also poses another question, which is maybe more relevant: to what extent can a regional retail plan assessment commission improve the 'new' regional governance structure, or contribute to its development? For regions and sub-regions, it might be especially important to investigate to what extent the establishment of such commissions can improve policy goal achievement; thus, the influence of such commissions could be isolated in future research. The current research provides many indications on possible leads for answering such a question, but the full question still remains unanswered. Future research could contribute to the research of van der Krabben (2009) on the effectiveness of new governance structures in retail planning. Possibly, such research could also contribute to the research of Verduijn et al. (2015), even though their research concerns a casestudy in the different 'sub-field' of spatial planning (nature conservation). In the same way that their research (partly) aimed to isolate the influence of policy entrepreneurs, such future research could aim to isolate the influence of retail plan assessment commissions. Perhaps certain theories about policy entrepreneurs may also (partly) apply to such retail plan assessment commissions, as to some extent, such commissions might be considered to be 'agents' that can change the policy field of

retail planning (Giddens, 1984). For solely focusing on the impact of such retail plan assessment commissions, the current research design might present certain flaws. For example, the only selected cases in which a (sub-regional) retail plan assessment commission was involved, were cases with a presumed high level of multi-level governance. If a future researcher would choose to isolate the influence of such commissions, it is recommended to conduct a comparative casestudy between two or more cases (or regional authorities) with such a commission, in order to compare different approaches towards implementing such a commission. Such research might also identify the 'best practices' for such policy tools. In different provinces and regions, the existence of such commissions has been identified. Overall, it seems that they may indeed have different regulations, compositions, and internal operating procedures. At the same time, sectoral organisations seem to consider such independent advisory commissions to be one of the pillars of successful regional coordination (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017).

"It is sensible if the provinces establish an independent advisory committee in the regulations. The committee assesses initiatives that go beyond a local interest – as indicated in the regulation – and can thus ensure that regional visions are actually complied with." (Nederlandse Raad Winkelcentra, 2017, p. 18).

Furthermore, future research might also determine if regional authorities can also reach a high level of multi-level governance (and 'practical' effectiveness in retail planning) without such a commission. Currently there does not seem to be much clarity on that.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the methodology in chapter '3. Methodology', geographic differences between municipalities have been taken into account in the selection of cases. In every group of cases, the purpose was to have a variety of different municipalities with regards to their geographic differences, in order to be able to take into account (and prevent) possible influences on multi-level governance that might be caused by 'purely' geographic factors, or differences in scale. This was decided because an earlier theory by Prud'homme (1995) provided the indication that such influences were possible. *"Most discussions of decentralization [...] ignore geography. [...] large cities should be treated differently from smaller jurisdictions even if they have the same legal status because they are more able to benefit from decentralization."* (Prud'homme, 1995, p. 214). In the case selection (in chapter '3.2.2 Data collection'), three types of geographic differences were therefore taken into account: (1) geographic size; (2) population size; (3) spatial structure. It should be considered that these three factors were not exhaustive on the spectrum of geographic factors. However, because these factors were incorporated (and taken into account) in the case selection process, this also means that it is still uncertain to what extent actual geographic differences might contribute to differences in multi-level governance, or the effectiveness of retail planning. Future research could investigate to what extent geographic differences might influence these matters. Such future research could foremost contribute to Prud'homme's (1995) theory on how geographic differences might influence decentralisation processes (and thereby governance systems). It could also contribute to van der Krabben's (2009) research on the effectiveness of new governance structures in retail planning.

Fourthly, as mentioned earlier, the conclusions of this study may only apply to the studied cases, because of methodological choices. The external validity is considered to be relatively low (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2018). In the conclusions of this research, many different influences on the effectiveness of municipalities' retail planning (that fit in a 'multi-level governance' approach)

have been identified. However, as this research concerns a comparative case study with an exploratory nature, the research can not 'prove' these influences. Still, the identified factors that might have an influence could provide leads for conducting further research, in order to assess these (possible) influences with quantitative research. In the long term, such quantitative research might provide more conclusive answers on the (statistical) significance of these possible influences. In that way, they might be 'proven' or 'disproven' more solidly. Another additional advantage for future quantitative research, would be that quantitative research can often include many more cases and larger datasets. With such a research design, more provinces, regional authorities or municipalities might be analysed or compared. Increasing the amount of cases, combined with increasing the size of the datasets, may both increase the external validity of research on these matters to a much higher degree (Creswell, 2007). Such research could also improve (or contribute to) this particular study, because it could quantitatively 'prove' or 'disprove' the conclusions of this study, or the extent to which these conclusions might apply. Of course, such a research design would require a very different methodology. The same (or a similar) theoretical framework and its central research concepts would have to be translated into quantitative indicators.

7.3 Reflection

While conducting this research, several matters were encountered in different research phases that might provide useful insights and 'lessons learned' for conducting future research. These have been summarised in this reflection.

First, it is important to consider that the decision on the purpose and function of the sub-questions in this research (which themselves can be found in chapter '*1.3 Research question*'), have implications. As mentioned before, using the sub-questions as methodological 'tools' for collecting, organising and focusing parts of the results (from chapter '*5. Results*') was a conscious decision. It was aimed to make the conducted research and its process more focused, to make the conclusion more theoretically grounded, and thereby allow for more theoretical reflection. However, there were more reasons. From a functional- and efficiency-viewpoint, the choice to compare the answers of the sub-questions directly to the theoretical framework also seemed logical. This made it possible to first filter and thereby condense the results to only the most relevant parts, before comparing these results to the theoretical framework. This made the overall comparison clearer, and also left room for a broader comparison, because there was more room for relevant factors to be explored in-depth. The results could be analysed on more details and nuances in their comparison to the theoretical framework. Because of all these considerations, it was decided early on to base the answers to the sub-questions entirely on the research results. Of course, this has the important implication that the answer to the main research question is mostly based on the comparative analysis from chapter '*6. Comparative analysis*', and thus not (directly) on the answers to the sub-questions. The answers to the sub-questions first function as input to the comparative analysis. In a study following the 'classical' way of research, the answers to the sub-questions would together have formed the answers to the main research question. However, looking at it from another perspective, aforementioned decision only changed the place of the theoretical comparison within the research process. It is

perceived that changing the place of this theoretical comparison within the research process made the theoretical comparison itself more relevant.

In addition to this, a similar decision was made to include additional matters in the theoretical comparisons in chapter '6. *Comparative analysis*'. This concerns a comparison of the results with the operationalisation beforehand. The decision to include this comparison as well was made because the used indicators mostly have their foundation in theories and studies that were specifically developed to measure the studied research concepts, which often have been used in research practice before. By including such a comparison as well, the theoretical comparison presented in that chapter might not only reveal how the answers to the sub-questions (and thereby the relevant results) fit into the theoretical framework, but it may also reveal to what extent the indicators were successful in measuring these research concepts and their variables. This might provide a more complete perspective. It is perceived that this has increased the construct validity, as it has made it more clear to what extent the developed indicators accurately measured the theoretical concepts (Yin, 2018).

It might be considered that the amount of included indicators was relatively high. In total, from the theoretical framework and the operationalisation together, 20 indicators were taken into account, as can be seen in Figure 3.1. Derived from the analysis, one indicator was added to this as a 'free code', while seven 'original' indicators were considered to be non-relevant, and were subsequently removed (Saldaña, 2009). The removal of these seven indicators is perceived to be an improvement, because firstly, it increased the reliability of the research. In other words, the remaining indicators now became more theoretically coherent in measuring their specific research concepts (Vennix, 2012). At the same time, their removal also increased the construct validity, because the totality of all indicators taken together now measure the theoretical concepts more accurately (Yin, 2018). However, the 14 remaining indicators (with the inclusion of the one 'free code' indicator) are internally quite divergent, and have a broad scope sometimes. For example, if one takes the indicator '*the extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale)*', this indicator practically includes three different sub-indicators that need to be addressed: (1) long-term goals; (2) responsibility descriptions; (3) timescales. However, this is not the only indicator for which this principle applies. Because of such indicators, the overall scope of all indicators taken together is still quite broad. It is perceived that the research was able to achieve a holistic account of the problem that was studied, because many different dimensions and indicators were included, in order to capture the 'natural state' of the theoretical concepts to the greatest extent (Creswell, 2007). However, in similar future research, one of the four dimensions that were selected might be removed, in order to make the research process itself more efficient. This would decrease the overall amount of indicators, and therefore would also bring more conceptual focus into the research. Within the results, such a change might also provide for a higher level of depth for each individual indicator.

It should be considered that all interviewguides were subject to a long development process, in which they were carefully constructed and built-up in line with the operationalisation, which was a very iterative process. The structure of the proposed interview questions is intentionally as neutral as possible, which can increase the reliability. Still, for the municipalities that were represented by only one respondent, it might not be possible to know if another respondent (or representative of the municipality) might have provided the same answers. The practical length and size of the research did not allow for multiple interviews per case

(municipality) at the municipal level. However, to increase the construct validity, a specific choice was made before the start of the analysis. It was considered that the respondents from municipalities might not be expected to be entirely 'objective' in providing answers on the last dimension, which concerns the dependent variable (the effectiveness of municipal retail planning), because it might be potentially difficult for them to point out the (possible) room for improvement in their own municipality's policies. It is possible that they could have had an interest to 'defend' their own municipality's policies. Besides, this would also have been an undesirable situation because the respondents might also have been directly involved in the development of these same policies (that they otherwise would have had to describe based on plan quality interview questions). This would have presented many new uncertainties for the analysis. It was decided to avoid such (potential) conflicts of interest by basing the measurement of the plan quality of local plans mainly on a qualitative content analysis, rather than on respondent interviews. For all six selected cases (municipalities), the retail visions were analysed through a content analysis. Sometimes studying municipalities' retail visions provided input for asking interview questions to respondents for clarification purposes, but the main body of the results for plan quality (which can be found in chapter '5.4 Quality and implementation of local plans') is based on the qualitative content analysis.

One other consideration that needs to be made, is that all studied actors (municipalities, regional authorities, and the province) operate in a political-administrative context. Of course, this is logical, as it was this same context that provided additional depth to the study of relationships between governmental actors (from different governance levels), and in factors related to their decision-making processes. However, this also has other implications. Because of this political-administrative context, some issues seemed to be sensitive to a certain degree. This applied especially to one indicator within the dimension of municipal decision-making, namely '*the actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders*'. For most selected cases (municipalities), a more generalised indication of the municipality's experience with this indicator was provided in the results. During respondent interviews it was often made clear that details about (possible) disagreements, or specific examples of such (possible) disagreements, were considered to be of a confidential nature, and potentially concerned sensitive information. Therefore, the decision was made to not publish about specific disagreements. Instead, the decision was made to generalise this indicator to a large extent, and it was decided to omit all (possible) mentions or references to individual cases, details or examples of specific disagreements. Unfortunately this might have had a small impact on the indicator's construct validity, as it might not be possible to communicate the full scope of this indicator's results (and its interpretation) without all results connected to it. This generalisation may have prevented the interpretation of some specific examples that could have provided a more in-depth indication of how such situations might work in practice.

Another consideration is that the generalizability of this research may be (relatively) low because of the decreased external validity, as this research is a comparative casestudy with an exploratory nature (Yin, 2018). However, this also has one important implication. It was already mentioned that the conclusions and recommendations may only be applicable for the researched cases, as the conclusions may not be generalised externally without further research. But it is important to also make the distinction that this does not necessarily mean that the research's structure is not generalizable at the theoretical level. The used research concepts, operationalisation and the theoretical framework, as well as the theoretical connections

established in the conceptual model (in Figure 2.6), may all be applied to different cases (to a certain extent), because these matters are perceived to be theoretically coherent. This also applies to the used methodology. This should be especially the case because the theoretical coherence was increased by the removal of non-relevant indicators (which should have increased the research's construct validity and the internal validity). In other words, the entire research setup itself could be applied to different cases.

A final consideration that applies to this research, is the consideration that geographic differences between municipalities have been taken into account in the selection of cases. As has been mentioned before, these geographic differences were based on Prud'homme's (1995) study. This decision was made because geographic differences might have had an influence on decentralisation processes (and thereby also on multi-level governance). Practically, this meant that within groups of cases, it was pursued to include municipalities of different geographic sizes, population sizes, and spatial structures. This was also mentioned before. However, it is important to consider that these three differences might not be the only geographic differences that had an influence on the decentralisation processes of the selected cases. The selected differences that were focused on (geographic sizes, population sizes, and spatial structures) were only the largest geographic differences. In future research, more smaller geographic differences might be identified that also have an influence on decentralisation processes (and thereby on the governance structure). It is perceived that for the current research setup this factor (geographic differences) did not have large implications, because the aim was to prevent its influence by taking the factor into account in the case selection process. In the context of this research, Prud'homme's (1995) geographic differences were not used as indicators or as a dimension, but instead they were taken into account in the case selection process (within each group of cases) in order to prevent their influence. However, future research could incorporate a dimension (or indicators) concerning geographic differences, because it seems that they might play a role in the decentralisation of policy competencies in governance systems. Future research could further analyse that possibility.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Framework of the data collection

Concepts	Dimensions	Indicators	Sources
Multi-level governance	Decentralisation of retail planning competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The convincingness of an actor's argument for its involvement in the development of strategic plans in retail planning; The number of (governmental) actors from different jurisdictions having an influence on retail planning in the municipality; The experienced balance between control over policy content in retail planning and the influence on retail planning by external (governmental) actors; <i>The experienced freedom by an actor to implement funding into projects (operational plans) for retail planning.</i> 	(Prud'homme, 1995) (Hooghe & Marks, 2001) (Smith, 1997) (Smith, 1997)
	Quality of (power) relationships between (governmental) actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actor's experience with hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors; The actor's role in the translation of 'higher-level' strategic plans to local spatial policy (or its help or support therein); The actor's experienced value of routine meetings between different (governmental) actors and the decisions that such meetings produce; <i>The actor's experience with formal rules that constrain the relationships/interaction/cooperation with other (governmental) actors;</i> <i>The experienced change in the actor's relationship with 'higher-level' (governmental) actors after the recent major policy reform in retail planning (in 2004).</i> 	(Hooghe & Marks, 2001) (Prud'homme, 1995) (Hooghe & Marks, 2001) (Marks, 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2001) (Smith, 1997)
Municipal decision-making	Leadership legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actor's experience of its faring in disagreements with other (governmental) actors or their leaders; The perceived necessity by municipalities to make (or negotiate for) strategic retail plans for larger regions. 	(Smith, 1997) (Smith, 1997)
	Inclusion of strategic plans into decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which arguments behind operational decisions reflect the strategic plan; <i>The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's knowledge and interpretation of the strategic plan behind operational decisions;</i> <i>The extent of the actor's operational decision-maker's acceptance and use of the strategic plan as part of operational decision situations.</i> 	(Faludi, 1989) (Faludi, 1989) (Faludi, 1989)
Effectiveness of municipal retail planning	Quality of local plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which the present local conditions and context are included in the strategic plan; The extent to which the strategic plan contains a narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and to improve commitment to plan goals; The extent to which the strategic plan includes provisions for coordination with other (governmental) actors or existing policies; The extent to which the strategic plan contains provisions to ensure consistent implementation (clear long-term goals, a description of responsibilities for implementation, and a timescale); <i>The extent to which the strategic plan is accessible to the wider public;</i> <i>The extent to which the strategic plan was perceived to be useful in supporting decision-making.</i> 	(Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019) (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019) (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019) (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019) (Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019) (Lyles et al., 2016; Rudolf & Grădinaru, 2019)

Table A1.1: Framework of the data collection.

Appendix 2: Municipalities in the Netherlands

There are many similarities in the characteristics of municipalities in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, all municipalities have a municipal council. This municipal council consists of elected representatives, which are elected through local elections (Needham, 2016). In general, these elected representatives are often required to be residents of the same municipality for which they become eligible. Besides the municipal council, there is the municipal college, also known as the 'college of mayor and aldermen'. As its name implies, it consists of the municipality's mayor and the aldermen. The municipal college functions as the municipality's executive board, and it is responsible for the municipality's daily management. The aldermen in the municipal college are chosen by a majority vote of the municipal council. Often the aldermen also are members of the municipal council themselves, although this is not always obligatory; in some municipalities, aldermen may be externally hired, and can function as managers. Since 2003, municipalities operate according to the principles of dualism (Needham, 2016).

"This means that the elected representatives have the responsibility for the general content of policy, the executive board for working out that policy and implementing it. [...] In particular, municipal councils have become much more critical of their executive boards, and the 'aldermen' have become professional managers." (Needham, 2016, p. 93).

The procedure for choosing a mayor is not uniform for all municipalities in the Netherlands. However, for the procedure of appointing a mayor, the House of Representatives ultimately makes the final decision, and each mayor is appointed through a designation by royal decree (Needham, 2016). Generally, the person holding the office of mayor can not hold a position in the municipal council at the same time. The mayor is the chairman of the municipal college, but is not official the 'head of government' of a municipality.

It might be of additional relevance for this research that a municipality's organisation of its departments (which are often called domains) is not uniform for all municipalities in the Netherlands. Practically there will often be similarities between their organisation structures, because their responsibilities are also similar. However, municipalities are free to organise their departments (domains) in the way that they consider most effective (Needham, 2016). A department of spatial planning may exist in one municipality, but might not exist in another municipality. *"The municipality is not obliged by law to have a department of spatial planning, or some such."* (Needham, 2016, p. 93).

Over time municipalities in the Netherlands averagely became much bigger, often because of municipal reorganisations. In municipal reorganisations municipalities may either fuse together with another municipality (or multiple municipalities at the same time) to form an entirely 'new' municipality, or they may be added to a larger, existing municipality (which is often a large city). Throughout history, different municipal reorganisations happened, often in different phases. The specific municipal reorganisation that might have had the largest impact on the municipalities in the province of Noord-Brabant happened in 1997, and might be the most relevant municipal reorganisation for this research. In that year the Netherlands as a whole decreased from 625 to 572 municipalities, which means that 53 municipalities (8.48% of them) ceased to exist. The majority of those (former) municipalities were located in the province of Noord-brabant (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020a).

Indeed, some of the selected cases have a different administrative composition since 1997, which is also relevant for their statistics, census data, population and geographic areas (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020a). Describing how municipalities in the Netherlands are organised may be important in qualitative research. The ‘natural conditions’ of the cases could provide a deeper insight into the contexts of the casestudies, and might provide a better and more detailed understanding of the cases (Creswell, 2007).

“We conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue. We cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it – whether this context is their home, family, or work.” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

Appendix 3: Interviewguide for municipalities

Dutch (original) version

Radboud University

Nijmegen, the Netherlands



Introductie

Hallo, mijn naam is Maxim Reinders. Bedankt voor uw medewerking aan dit interview. Ik ben een masterstudent Planologie aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, met als specialisatie Planologie, Land- en Vastgoedontwikkeling (*Planning, Land and Real Estate Development*).

Dit onderzoek doe ik voor mijn masterthesis. Hiervoor onderzoek ik de mogelijke invloed van multi-level governance op gemeentelijke detailhandelplanning. Ik kijk niet specifiek naar de resultaten van gemeentelijke detailhandelplanning, maar of het proces van de detailhandelplanning zelf erdoor veranderd is. Met multi-level governance worden systemen bedoeld waarin actoren van (vaak) verschillende niveaus complexe relaties hebben, die blijvend aan verandering onderhevig zijn door onderhandeling en coördinatie tussen actoren. Het gaat hierbij om zowel formele als informele relaties tussen actoren, welke niet noodzakelijkerwijs gebaseerd zijn op de hiërarchie, maar welke vaak wel onderhevig zijn aan bepaalde regels of protocollen. Mijn focus bestaat uit het onderzoeken van de coördinatie met andere actoren bij enkele gemeenten, de provincie en zo mogelijk nog meer actoren.

Eerder onderzoek toont aan dat multi-level governance mogelijk op verschillende manieren een invloed kan hebben op besluitvorming en beleidseffectiviteit, zowel op positieve als negatieve manieren. Het lijkt invloed gehad te hebben bij besluitvorming over sommige initiatieven voor industriële herontwikkeling, voor het aanbod van bouwgrond, maar ook voor de implementatie van sommige ecologische plannen. Vandaar wordt onderzocht of het ook een rol zou kunnen spelen bij detailhandelbeleid. Dit specifieke onderzoek focust op de gemeente en haar interactie en afstemming met andere actoren in het beleidsgebied van de detailhandelplanning. Dit onderzoek streeft ernaar processen zo objectief mogelijk vast te leggen, zonder hier een oordeel over te vellen.

Vindt u het goed als ik dit interview opneem? Dit is gewenst vanuit mijn onderwijsinstelling, de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. Persoonlijke informatie uit de interviews (of opnames) zal nooit openbaar worden gemaakt of gepubliceerd. Persoonsnamen zullen alleen gepubliceerd worden indien u dit toestaat. Alle informatie zal strikt vertrouwelijk behandeld worden. Alle informatie heeft uitsluitend tot doel om te gebruiken in academisch onderzoek door de interviewende student, om daarmee tot valide en betrouwbare onderzoeksresultaten te komen. De informatie zal niet voor andere doeleinden worden gebruikt. Het interview zal bij benadering een halfuur duren.

1. Introductievragen

- Kunt u mij iets vertellen over wie u bent? (Bijvoorbeeld: naam, leeftijd, woonplaats)
- Welk beroep of welke functie oefent u uit bij de gemeente?

2. Multi-level governance

2.1 Decentralisatie van competenties van detailhandelplanning

- a. Wat is het belangrijkste argument van de gemeente om betrokken te zijn bij de detailhandelplanning in de gemeente?
- b. In hoeverre vindt u het argument van de gemeente om betrokken te zijn bij de detailhandelplanning in de gemeente overtuigend?
- c. Hebben externe (overheids)actoren een invloed op de detailhandelplanning van deze gemeente?
 - (Bijvoorbeeld andere gemeenten, regionale actoren, provincie, nationale overheid, belangengroepen)
- d. In hoeverre ervaart de gemeente de vrijheid om naar eigen inzicht financiële middelen te implementeren in operationele plannen (projecten)?
- e. Is er een balans tussen de gemeente's controle over beleidsinhoud in detailhandelplanning en de externe financiering in de gemeente's detailhandelplanning door externe (overheids)actoren?

2.2 De kwaliteit van (machts)verhoudingen tussen actoren

- a. In hoeverre ervaart de gemeente een hiërarchie in haar formele of informele relaties met andere (overheids)actoren?
- b. In hoeverre ervaart de gemeente symmetrie of asymmetrie (of afhankelijkheid) in haar formele of informele relaties met andere (overheids)actoren?
- c. Zijn er formele regels, wetten of protocollen die de omgang of relaties van de gemeente met andere (overheids)actoren reguleren?
 - Zo ja, hoe worden deze regels ervaren door de gemeente?
 - Zijn deze regels er voor: (1) de vertegenwoordiging van de gemeente op verschillende andere (overheids)niveaus; (2) beleidsvorming; (3) probleemoplossing?
- d. Zijn er geroutineerde besprekingen over detailhandelplanning tussen de gemeente en andere (overheids)actoren?
 - Zo ja, wat is volgens de gemeente de meerwaarde van dergelijke geroutineerde besprekingen, en beslissingen (of afstemming) die daaruit voortvloeien?
- e. In hoeverre ervaart de gemeente een verandering in relaties met externe (overheids)actoren na de recente beleidshervorming in de Nederlandse detailhandelsplanning in 2004¹⁰?

¹⁰ De 'Nota Ruimte: Ruimte voor ontwikkeling' uit 2004 wordt hiermee bedoeld (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). Daarmee werd de detailhandelplanning gedecentraliseerd en werden nationale detailhandelrestricties afgeschaft. Provincies mochten hun eigen detailhandelbeleid gaan bepalen. Het verschilt sterk per provincie hoeveel voormalige restricties ze overnamen, waarbij in sommige provincies gemeenten meer het initiatief namen tot regulatie. De nationale overheid staat nog steeds achter het beschermen van de bestaande detailhandelstructuur, maar heeft voornamelijk de verdeling van verantwoordelijkheden veranderd (Krabben, 2009; Spierings, 2006).

3. Gemeentelijke besluitvorming

3.1 Draagvlak van leiderschap

- a. Komt het voor dat er onenigheid is tussen de gemeente en externe (overheids)actoren over het door de gemeente gevoerde detailhandelbeleid?
- b. Vindt u dat de gemeente leiderschap toont in de situaties dat er een verschil van inzicht is over het gevoerde detailhandelbeleid met een andere (overheids)actor?
- c. In hoeverre ervaart de gemeente de behoefte (of noodzaak) om strategische plannen (visies) te maken voor grotere regio's, of hierover te onderhandelen met andere (overheids)actoren?
 - Zo ja, geldt dit ook voor strategische detailhandelplannen (visies)?

3.2 De opname van strategische plannen in gemeentelijke besluitvorming

- a. In hoeverre hebben de gemeente's beleidsmakers die operationele plannen (projecten) coördineren en hierover besluiten, kennis van het achterliggende strategische plan (visie)?
- b. In hoeverre accepteren en gebruiken de gemeente's beleidsmakers die operationele plannen (projecten) coördineren en hierover besluiten, het strategische plan (visie) als onderdeel van operationele beslissingssituaties?
 - Heeft het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) relevante input voor hun overwegingen gevormd?¹¹
- c. In hoeverre weerspiegelen de argumenten achter de operationele beslissingen (projecten) het strategische plan (visie) volgens u?

¹¹ In hoeverre de gemeente's beleidsmakers voor operationele plannen het strategische plan accepteren, kan geclassificeerd worden in vier scenario's: (1) het operationele plan komt overeen met het strategische plan, en er zijn vaak directe referenties naar; (2) het strategische plan wordt gebruikt om afwijkingen in het operationele plan te beargumenteren; (3) consequenties vanuit het operationele plan vereisen evaluatie, waarvoor wordt teruggekeken naar het strategische plan; (4) er zijn teveel verschillen tussen het operationele plan en het strategische plan volgens de volksvertegenwoordiging, waardoor het strategische plan wordt herzien. Wanneer andersom het strategische plan het startpunt is (en het operationele plan wordt aangepast), noemt men dat 'regeneratieve capaciteit' (Faludi, 1989).

4. Effectiviteit van gemeentelijke detailhandelplanning

4.1 Kwaliteit van lokale plannen

- a. In hoeverre zijn de huidige lokale omstandigheden en context opgenomen in het strategische detailhandelplan (visie)?
 - Is hierbij het planningsproces zelf goed gedocumenteerd en verantwoord?
- b. In hoeverre is het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) toegankelijk of beschikbaar voor het bredere publiek?
 - Is het design van het strategische plan (visie) duidelijk gecommuniceerd?
- c. In hoeverre bevat het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) een duidelijke vertellende verhaallijn om belanghebbenden te motiveren en daarmee hun inzet voor plandoelen te verbeteren?
- d. In hoeverre wordt het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) als nuttig beschouwd voor het ondersteunen van besluitvorming (over projecten)?
- e. In hoeverre bevat het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) voorzieningen (of bepalingen) voor de coördinatie van beleid (of beslissingen) met andere (overheids)actoren, of met reeds bestaand beleid?
- f. In hoeverre bevat het strategische detailhandelplan (visie) voorzieningen (of bepalingen) met als doel om een consistente implementatie te verzekeren?
 - Hierbij is te denken aan voorzieningen als: (1) heldere lange termijndoelen; (2) een beschrijving van de verantwoordelijkheden van alle actoren voor implementatie; (3) een tijdsschaal voor implementatie.
- g. Zijn de strategische detailhandelplannen (visies) van deze gemeente volgens u op een succesvolle wijze in de praktijk geïmplementeerd?

5. Afsluiting

- a. Zijn er nog zaken die u wilt vertellen, die eventueel van nut zouden kunnen zijn voor mijn onderzoek, maar die wellicht nog niet aan bod zijn geweest?



Introduction

Hello, my name is Maxim Reinders. Thanks you for your participation in this interview. I am a Master's student in Spatial Planning at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, within the specialisation of Planning, Land and Real Estate Development.

I conduct this research for my Master's thesis. For this, I investigate the possible influence of multi-level governance on municipal retail planning. I am not looking specifically at the results of municipal retail planning, but rather whether multi-level governance has changed the retail planning process itself. Multi-level governance refers to systems in which actors of (often) different levels have complex relationships, which are permanently subject to change because of negotiation and coordination between actors. This concerns both formal and informal relationships between actors, which are not necessarily based on the hierarchy, but which are often subject to certain rules or protocols. My focus is to investigate the coordination with other actors at a number of municipalities, the province and, if possible, even more actors.

Previous research shows that multi-level governance can potentially influence decision-making and policy effectiveness in different ways, in positive as well as negative ways. It seems to have had an influence on the decision-making of some industrial redevelopment initiatives, on the supply (offering) of building land, but also on the implementation of certain ecological plans. Because of that, it is being investigated whether it could also play a role in retail policy. This specific study focuses on the municipality and its interaction and coordination with other actors in the policy field of retail planning. This research aims to capture processes as objectively as possible, without judging them.

Would it be okay with you if I record this interview? This is desirable from my educational institution, Radboud University Nijmegen. Personal information from the interviews or recordings, including personal names, will never be made public or published. All information will be dealt with in strict confidence. All information is exclusively intended for use in academic research by the interviewing student, in order to reach valid and reliable research results with it. The information will not be used for other purposes. The interview will take approximately half an hour.

1. Introduction questions

- a. Can you tell me something about who you are? (For example: name, age, place of residence)
- b. Which profession (or which function) do you hold at the municipality?

2. Multi-level governance

2.1 Decentralisation of retail planning competencies

- a. What is the most important argument of the municipality for being involved in retail planning in the municipality?
- b. To what extent do you find the municipality's argument for being involved in the retail planning in the municipality convincing?
- c. Do external (governmental) actors have an influence on the retail planning of this municipality?
 - (For example other municipalities, regional actors, province, national government, interest groups)
- d. To what extent does the municipality experience the freedom to implement financial resources into operational plans (projects) at its own discretion?
- e. Is there a balance between the municipality's control over policy content in retail planning and the external funding into the municipality's retail planning by external (governmental) actors?

2.2 The quality of (power) relationships between actors

- a. To what extent does the municipality experience a hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors?
- b. To what extent does the municipality experience symmetry or asymmetry (or dependence) in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors?
- c. Are there formal rules, laws or protocols that regulate the dealings or relationships of the municipality with other (governmental) actors?
 - If so, how are these rules experienced by the municipality?
 - Do these rules provide for: (1) the representation of the municipality on different other (governmental) levels; (2) policymaking; (3) problem solving?
- d. Are there routine meetings/discussions about retail planning between the municipality and other (governmental) actors?
 - If so, what is the added value of such routine meetings/discussions, and decisions (or coordination) that result from them, according to the municipality?
- e. To what extent does the municipality experience a change in its relationships with external (governmental) actors after the recent policy reform in Dutch retail planning in 2004¹²?

¹² De 'Nota Ruimte: Ruimte voor ontwikkeling' (Regulation on Space: Space for development) from 2004 is meant with this (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). With that regulation, retail planning was decentralised and national retail restrictions were abolished. Provinces were allowed to determine their own retail policy. It differs strongly per province as to how many former restrictions they took over, where in some provinces municipalities took the initiative for regulation. The national government still supports protecting the existing retail structure, but has mainly changed the division of responsibilities (Krabben, 2009; Spierings, 2006).

3. Municipal decision-making

3.1 Support base of leadership

- a. Does it occur that there is disagreement between the municipality and external (governmental) actors about the retail policy pursued by the municipality?
- b. Do you think that the municipality shows leadership in situations in which there is a difference of viewpoint with another (governmental) actor about the retail policy pursued?
- c. To what extent does the municipality experience the need (or necessity) to make strategic plans (visions) for larger regions, or to negotiate about these with other (governmental) actors?
 - If so, does this also apply to strategic retail plans (visions)?

3.2 The inclusion of strategic plans into municipal decision-making

- a. To what extent do the municipality's policymakers that coordinate operational plans (projects) and decide on them, have knowledge of the underlying strategic plan (vision)?
- b. To what extent do the municipality's policymakers that coordinate operational plans (projects) and decide on them, accept and use the strategic plan (vision) as a part of operational decision situations?
 - Has the strategic retail plan (vision) provided a relevant input for their considerations¹³?
- c. To what extent do the arguments behind the operational decisions (projects) reflect the strategic plan (vision) according to you?

¹³ The extent to which the municipality's policymakers for operational plans accept the strategic plan, can be classified in four scenarios: (1) the operational plan is in consistence with the strategic plan, and often there are direct references to it; (2) the strategic plan is used to justify deviations in the operational plans; (3) consequences from the operational plan demand evaluation, for which the strategic plan is reviewed; (4) there are too many differences between the operational plan and the strategic plan according to the parliamentary representation, causing the strategic plan to be revised. Conversely, when the strategic plan is the starting point (and the operational plan is adjusted), this is called 'regenerative capacity' (Faludi, 1989).

4. Effectiveness of municipal retail planning

4.1 Quality of local plans

- a. To what extent are the current local circumstances and context included in the strategic retail plan (vision)?
 - Has the planning process itself been well-documented and justified with this?
- b. To what extent is the strategic retail plan (vision) accessible or available to the wider public?
 - Is the design of the strategic plan (vision) clearly communicated?
- c. To what extent does the strategic retail plan (vision) contain a clear narrative storyline to motivate stakeholders and thereby improve their commitment to plan goals?
- d. To what extent is the strategic retail plan (vision) considered to be useful in supporting decision-making (on projects)?
- e. To what extent does the strategic retail plan (vision) contain provisions for the coordination of policies (or decisions) with other (governmental) actors, or with existing policies?
- f. To what extent does the strategic retail plan (vision) contain provisions with the goal/aim of ensuring consistent implementation?
 - Examples include provisions such as: (1) clear long-term goals; (2) a description of the responsibilities of all actors for implementation; (3) a timescale for implementation.
- g. Do you think that the strategic retail plans (visions) from this municipality have been implemented in a successful way in practice?

5. Closing

- a. Are there any other matters that you would like to discuss or talk about, that could possibly be useful for my research, but which may not have been addressed yet?

Appendix 4: Interviewguide for regional authorities and the province

Dutch (original) version

Radboud University

Nijmegen, the Netherlands



Introductie

Hallo, mijn naam is Maxim Reinders. Bedankt voor uw medewerking aan dit interview. Ik ben een masterstudent Planologie aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, met als specialisatie Planologie, Land- en Vastgoedontwikkeling (*Planning, Land and Real Estate Development*).

Dit onderzoek doe ik voor mijn masterthesis. Hiervoor onderzoek ik de mogelijke invloed van multi-level governance op gemeentelijke detailhandelplanning. Ik kijk niet specifiek naar de resultaten van gemeentelijke detailhandelplanning, maar of het proces van de detailhandelplanning zelf erdoor veranderd is. Met multi-level governance worden systemen bedoeld waarin actoren van (vaak) verschillende niveaus complexe relaties hebben, die blijvend aan verandering onderhevig zijn door onderhandeling en coördinatie tussen actoren. Het gaat hierbij om zowel formele als informele relaties tussen actoren, welke niet noodzakelijkerwijs gebaseerd zijn op de hiërarchie, maar welke vaak wel onderhevig zijn aan bepaalde regels of protocollen. Mijn focus bestaat uit het onderzoeken van de coördinatie met andere actoren bij enkele gemeenten, de provincie en zo mogelijk nog meer actoren.

Eerder onderzoek toont aan dat multi-level governance op verschillende manieren een invloed kan hebben op besluitvorming en beleidseffectiviteit, zowel op positieve als negatieve manieren. Het lijkt invloed gehad te hebben bij besluitvorming over sommige initiatieven voor industriële herontwikkeling, voor het aanbod van bouwgrond, maar ook voor de implementatie van sommige ecologische plannen. Vandaar wordt onderzocht of het ook een rol zou kunnen spelen bij detailhandelbeleid. Dit specifieke onderzoek focust op de regio/provincie en haar interactie en afstemming met andere actoren in het beleidsgebied van de detailhandelplanning. Dit onderzoek streeft ernaar processen zo objectief mogelijk vast te leggen, zonder hier een oordeel over te vellen.

Vindt u het goed als ik dit interview opneem? Dit is gewenst vanuit mijn onderwijsinstelling, de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. Persoonlijke informatie uit de interviews (of opnames) zal nooit openbaar worden gemaakt of gepubliceerd. Persoonsnamen zullen alleen gepubliceerd worden indien u dit toestaat. Alle informatie zal strikt vertrouwelijk behandeld worden. Alle informatie heeft uitsluitend tot doel om te gebruiken in academisch onderzoek door de interviewende student, om daarmee tot valide en betrouwbare onderzoeksresultaten te komen. De informatie zal niet voor andere doeleinden worden gebruikt. Het interview zal bij benadering een halfuur duren.

1. Introductievragen

- Kunt u mij iets vertellen over wie u bent? (Bijvoorbeeld: naam, leeftijd, woonplaats)
- Welk beroep of welke functie oefent u uit bij de regio/provincie?

2. Multi-level governance

2.1 Decentralisatie van competenties van detailhandelplanning

- a. In hoeverre of op welke manier is de regio/provincie betrokken bij de detailhandelplanning in gemeenten?
 - Zo ja, wat is het belangrijkste argument van de regio/provincie om betrokken te zijn bij de detailhandelplanning in gemeenten?
- b. In hoeverre vindt u het argument van de regio/provincie om betrokken te zijn bij detailhandelplanning in gemeenten overtuigend?
- c. Hebben andere (overheids)actoren een invloed op de wijze waarop de regio/provincie betrokken is bij de detailhandelplanning?
 - (Bijvoorbeeld andere gemeenten, regionale actoren, provincie, nationale overheid, belangengroepen)
- d. In hoeverre heeft de regio/provincie de vrijheid om naar eigen inzicht financiële middelen te implementeren in operationele detailhandelplannen (projecten) van gemeenten?
- e. In hoeverre heeft de regio/provincie een invloed op de beleidsinhoud in detailhandelplanning van gemeenten?
- f. *[Voor regio's]: Hoe gaat de toetsing van bovenlokale of grootschalige detailhandelsinitiatieven door een onafhankelijke commissie in zijn werk? Waarom hebben sommige sub-regio's hier een speciale commissie voor? Bestaat een dergelijke commissie ook op het regionale niveau?*

2.2 De kwaliteit van (machts)verhoudingen tussen actoren

- a. In hoeverre ervaart de regio/provincie een hiërarchie in haar formele of informele relaties met andere (overheids)actoren?
- b. In hoeverre ervaart de regio/provincie symmetrie of asymmetrie (of afhankelijkheid) in haar formele of informele relaties met andere (overheids)actoren?
- c. Zijn er formele regels, wetten of protocollen die de omgang of relaties van de regio/provincie met andere (overheids)actoren reguleren?
 - Zo ja, hoe worden deze regels ervaren door de regio/provincie?
 - Zijn deze regels er voor: (1) de vertegenwoordiging gemeenten op het regionale/provinciale niveau; (2) beleidsvorming; (3) probleemoplossing?
- d. Zijn er geroutineerde besprekingen over detailhandelplanning tussen de regio/provincie en andere (overheids)actoren, zoals gemeenten?
 - Zo ja, wat is volgens de regio/provincie de meerwaarde van dergelijke geroutineerde besprekingen, en beslissingen (of afstemming) die daaruit voortvloeien?
- e. In hoeverre ervaart de regio/provincie een verandering in relaties met externe (overheids)actoren op andere schaalniveaus na de recente beleidshervorming in de Nederlandse detailhandelsplanning in 2004¹⁴?

¹⁴ De 'Nota Ruimte: Ruimte voor ontwikkeling' uit 2004 wordt hiermee bedoeld (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). Daarmee werd de detailhandelplanning gedecentraliseerd en werden nationale detailhandelrestricties afgeschaft. Provincies mochten hun eigen detailhandelbeleid gaan bepalen. Het verschilt sterk per provincie hoeveel voormalige restricties ze overnamen, waarbij in sommige provincies gemeenten meer het initiatief namen tot regulatie. De nationale overheid staat nog steeds

- f. *[Voor regio's]: Hoe gaat de samenwerking (of afstemming) met sub-regio's precies in zijn werk? Zijn hun visies verdere uitwerkingen van de regionale visie, of zijn er verschillen van inzicht?*

3. Regionale/provinciale besluitvorming

3.1 Draagvlak van leiderschap

- a. Komt het voor dat er onenigheid is tussen de regio/provincie en gemeenten over het door de regio/provincie gevoerde detailhandelbeleid?
- b. Vindt u dat de regio/provincie leiderschap toont in de situaties dat er een verschil van inzicht is over het gevoerde detailhandelbeleid met een gemeente?
- c. In hoeverre ervaart of ziet de regio/provincie de noodzaak om strategische plannen (visies) te maken voor grotere regio's, of hierover te onderhandelen met andere (overheids)actoren?
 - Geldt dit ook voor strategische detailhandelplannen (visies)?

3.2 De opname van strategische plannen in gemeentelijke besluitvorming

- a. In hoeverre heeft de regio/provincie inzicht in de strategische detailhandelplannen (visies) en operationele detailhandelplannen (projecten) van gemeenten?
- b. In hoeverre is de regio/provincie betrokken bij de uitvoering van operationele detailhandelplannen (projecten) van gemeenten?
 - Zo ja, heeft de regio/provincie mogelijkheden tot interveniëren wanneer een operationeel plan (project) van een gemeente teveel afwijkt van het door de gemeente beoogde strategische plan (visie) ¹⁵?

4. Afsluiting

- a. Zijn er nog zaken die u wilt vertellen, die eventueel van nut zouden kunnen zijn voor mijn onderzoek, maar die wellicht nog niet aan bod zijn geweest?

achter het beschermen van de bestaande detailhandelstructuur, maar heeft voornamelijk de verdeling van verantwoordelijkheden veranderd (Krabben, 2009; Spierings, 2006).

¹⁵ In hoeverre de gemeente's beleidsmakers voor operationele plannen het strategische plan accepteren, kan geclassificeerd worden in vier scenario's: (1) het operationele plan komt overeen met het strategische plan, en er zijn vaak directe referenties naar; (2) het strategische plan wordt gebruikt om afwijkingen van het operationele plan te beargumenteren; (3) consequenties vanuit het operationele plan vereisen evaluatie, waarvoor wordt teruggekeken naar het strategische plan; (4) er zijn teveel verschillen tussen het operationele plan en het strategische plan volgens de volksvertegenwoordiging, waardoor het strategische plan wordt herzien. Wanneer andersom het strategische plan het startpunt is (en het operationele plan wordt aangepast), noemt men dat 'regeneratieve capaciteit' (Faludi, 1989).



Introduction

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I conduct this research for my Master's thesis. For this, I investigate the possible influence of multi-level governance on municipal retail planning. I am not looking specifically at the results of municipal retail planning, but rather whether multi-level governance has changed the retail planning process itself. Multi-level governance refers to systems in which actors of (often) different levels have complex relationships, which are permanently subject to change because of negotiation and coordination between actors. This concerns both formal and informal relationships between actors, which are not necessarily based on the hierarchy, but which are often subject to certain rules or protocols. My focus is to investigate the coordination with other actors at a number of municipalities, the province and, if possible, even more actors.

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1. Introduction questions

- a. Can you tell me something about who you are? (For example: name, age, place of residence)
- b. Which profession (or which function) do you hold at the region/province?

2. Multi-level governance

2.1 Decentralisation of retail planning competencies

- a. To what extent or in what way is the region/province involved in the retail planning in or by municipalities?
 - If so, what is the most important argument of the region/province for being involved in retail planning in municipalities?
- b. To what extent do you find the region's/province's argument for being involved in retail planning in municipalities convincing?
- c. Do other (governmental) actors have an influence on the way in which the region/province is involved in retail planning?
 - (For example other municipalities, regional actors, province, national government, interest groups)
- d. To what extent does the region/province experience the freedom to implement financial resources into operational retail plans (projects) from municipalities at its own discretion?
- e. To what extent does the region/province have an influence on the policy content in the retail planning of municipalities?
- f. *[For regions]: How does the assessment of above-local or large-scale retail initiatives by an independent commission work? Why do some sub-regions have a special commission for this? Does such a commission also exist at the regional level?*

2.2 The quality of (power) relationships between actors

- a. To what extent does the region/province experience a hierarchy in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors?
- b. To what extent does the region/province experience symmetry or asymmetry (or dependence) in its formal or informal relationships with other (governmental) actors?
- c. Are there formal rules, laws or protocols that regulate the dealings or relationships of the region/province with other (governmental) actors?
 - If so, how are these rules experienced by the region/province?
 - Do these rules provide for: (1) the representation of municipalities on the regional/provincial level; (2) policymaking; (3) problem solving?
- d. Are there routine meetings/discussions about retail planning between the region/province and other (governmental) actors?
 - If so, what is the added value of such routine meetings/discussions, and decisions (or coordination) that result from them, according to the region/province?
- e. To what extent does the region/province experience a change in its relationships with external (governmental) actors at other scale levels after the recent policy reform in Dutch retail planning in 2004¹⁶?

¹⁶ De 'Nota Ruimte: Ruimte voor ontwikkeling' (Regulation on Space: Space for development) from 2004 is meant with this (Ministerraad, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). With that regulation, retail planning was decentralised and national retail restrictions were abolished. Provinces were allowed to determine their own retail policy. It differs strongly per province as to how many former restrictions they took over, where in some provinces municipalities took the initiative for regulation. The national government still supports protecting the existing retail structure, but has mainly changed the division of responsibilities (Krabben, 2009; Spierings, 2006).

- f. *[For regions]: How exactly does the cooperation (or coordination) with sub-regions work? Are their visions further elaborations of the regional vision, or are there differences of opinion?*

3. Regional/provincial decision-making

3.1 Support base of leadership

- a. Does it occur that there is disagreement between the region/province and municipalities about the retail policy pursued by the region/province?
- b. Do you think that the region/province shows leadership in the situations in which there is a difference of viewpoint with a municipality about the pursued retail policy?
- c. To what extent does the region/province experience the need (or necessity) to make strategic plans (visions) for larger regions, or to negotiate about these with other (governmental) actors?
 - Does this also apply to strategic retail plans (visions)?

3.2 The inclusion of strategic plans into municipal decision-making

- a. To what extent does the region/province have insight into the strategic retail plans (visions) and operational retail plans (projects) from municipalities?
- b. To what extent is the region/province involved in the realisation of operational retail plans (projects) from municipalities?
 - If so, does the region/province have possibilities to intervene when an operational plan (project) from a municipality deviates too much from the strategic plan (vision) pursued by that municipality?¹⁷

4. Closing

- a. Are there any other matters that you would like to discuss or talk about, that could possibly be useful for my research, but which may not have been addressed yet?

¹⁷ The extent to which the municipality's policymakers for operational plans accept the strategic plan, can be classified in four scenarios: (1) the operational plan is in consistence with the strategic plan, and often there are direct references to it; (2) the strategic plan is used to justify deviations in the operational plans; (3) consequences from the operational plan demand evaluation, for which the strategic plan is reviewed; (4) there are too many differences between the operational plan and the strategic plan according to the parliamentary representation, causing the strategic plan to be revised. Conversely, when the strategic plan is the starting point (and the operational plan is adjusted), this is called 'regenerative capacity' (Faludi, 1989).

Appendix 5: Histories, local characteristics, economic characteristics, and retail sectors of the selected cases

Municipality of Eindhoven

The municipality's history

The municipality of Eindhoven is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant that contains one major city, which is the city of Eindhoven, and two smaller villages: Acht and Meerhoven. In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, Eindhoven is among the four largest cities in the province of Noord-Brabant (together with Breda, Tilburg, and 's-Hertogenbosch) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). Historically, Eindhoven started as a small village, officially becoming a city in 1232 A.D. Geographically it was located at an important intersection of two rivers and several different trade routes. Through new canals and roads its accessibility increased, and it was able to successfully develop textile industries and 'light bulb' industries in the 19th century because of this accessibility. After the 1920's it started growing more, thereby fusing with neighbouring municipalities in order to become a large city. By this change, it seems that Eindhoven's area size grew with 8,300%, while its number of inhabitants grew with 607%. The lighting company Philips, now a major international electronics company, seems to have played a large role in this growth. For the municipality's structure, Eindhoven's original structure (as a collection of smaller villages which were fused together) still plays a role. Sometime before the Second World War, these small villages grew together, but in 1942, during the Second World War, large parts of Eindhoven were destroyed by air raids. Most of the city centre's housing and infrastructure had to be reconstructed entirely after the war, but the original village structure still shaped the different city districts (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2019).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Eindhoven had a population of 229,126 people. The population density was 1,614 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 1.1%. From the inhabitants, 41.9% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 65.3% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 34.7% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €39,500. The average home value in the municipality was €226,000. From all houses, 44.9% were owner-occupied properties, while 53.8% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Eindhoven was 9.7%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Eindhoven's vacant retail

properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.1.

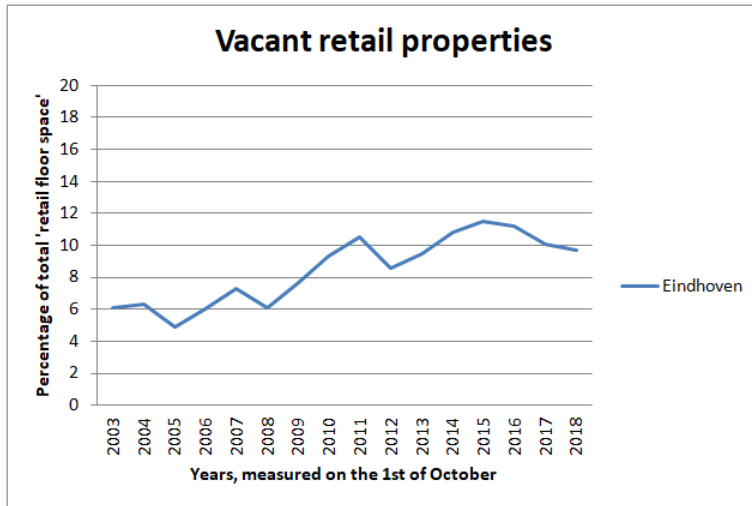


Figure A5.1: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Eindhoven, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Eindhoven was home to 20,750 companies. 4,430 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 21.3% of them. The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.7 km, while the average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km seems relatively high at 20.3 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Municipality of Boxtel

The municipality's history

The municipality of Boxtel is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant that contains three villages: Boxtel, Lennisheuvel, and Liempde. Formerly, these three villages were separate municipalities, but in 1996 Lennisheuvel and Liempde were added to the municipality of Boxtel through a municipal reorganisation (Heemkunde Boxtel, 2019). In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, it is a smaller municipality in the category of '50 smaller municipalities' (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). *"From that, the old Boxtel can best be typified as an urban core, Lennisheuvel on the south-side of Boxtel as a church village with an agricultural character, and Liempde as a well-preserved, authentic Brabantian village."* (Heemkunde Boxtel, 2019, p. 1). The village of Boxtel is known to exist from around the year of 1100 A.D., and originated next to the fords of a river. It seems that, after a local religious event around 1380 A.D., the Catholic Church became more important in its development, and Boxtel became a place of pilgrimage for several centuries. From then on, until the year of 1794 A.D. (the French Revolution), Boxtel was a so-called (nobility's) lordship; an estate in the possession of different families of Dutch nobility. This ceased after the French Revolution. In the 19th century, Boxtel became an 'official' municipality, and it became better connected through train networks. After the Second World War, it opened

more business parks, after which companies in farming, mechanics and meat-production settled there. The municipality is surrounded by forests and nature areas (Heemkunde Boxtel, 2019).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Boxtel had a population of 30,672 people. The population density was 481 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 0.2%. From the inhabitants, 22.8% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 84.3% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 15.7% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €44,100. The average home value in the municipality was €244,000. From all houses, 60.9% were owner-occupied properties, while 38.2% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Boxtel was 7.1%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Boxtel's vacant retail properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.2.

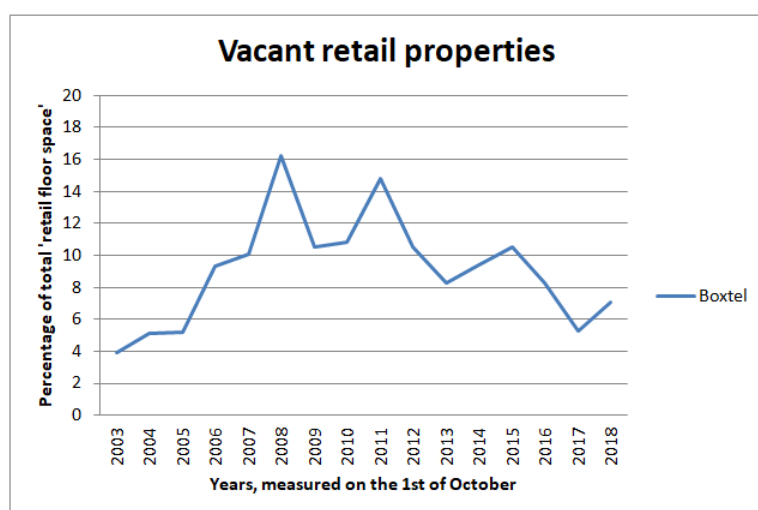


Figure A5.2: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Boxtel, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Boxtel was home to 2,695 companies. 560 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 20.8% of them.

The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.9 km. The average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km also seems relatively average at 5.7 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Municipality of Waalre

The municipality's history

The municipality of Waalre is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant that contains two villages, namely Waalre and Aalst. Formerly, these villages were both separate municipalities, but in 1923 they were fused together in order to become one single municipality, thereby locating their common administrative centre in Waalre (Gemeente Waalre, 2019). In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, it is a smaller municipality in the category of '50 smaller municipalities' (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). The village of Waalre exists since at least the eighth century A.D. The church of Waalre seems to be important for the village's history, since it is older than the village itself (Gemeente Waalre, 2019).

"Before the aggregation, Aalst and Waalre had their own character. Aalst was a clear example of ribbon development. The houses were mainly situated along the road [...]. The village of Waalre already had a village centre with clear main roads at the time, which now also still come together [...]" (Gemeente Waalre, 2019, p. 1).

Around the 1920's, before fusing, both municipalities grew considerably. At the moment, it is mentioned to be a municipality with a relatively high percentage of rich inhabitants, and it is mentioned to have a large percentage of villa houses. It is also mentioned to be known as a municipality that houses many commuters. The municipality seems to profile itself as a 'green municipality', mainly because of its policy of tree planting, and additionally because of its forest- and nature-rich location (Gemeente Waalre, 2019).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Waalre had a population of 17,075 people. The population density was 763 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 1.0%. From the inhabitants, 11.6% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 84.0% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 16.0% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €54,800. The average home value in the municipality was €316,000. From all houses, 75.1% were owner-occupied properties, while 24.6% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Waalre was 11.4%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Waalre's vacant retail properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.3.

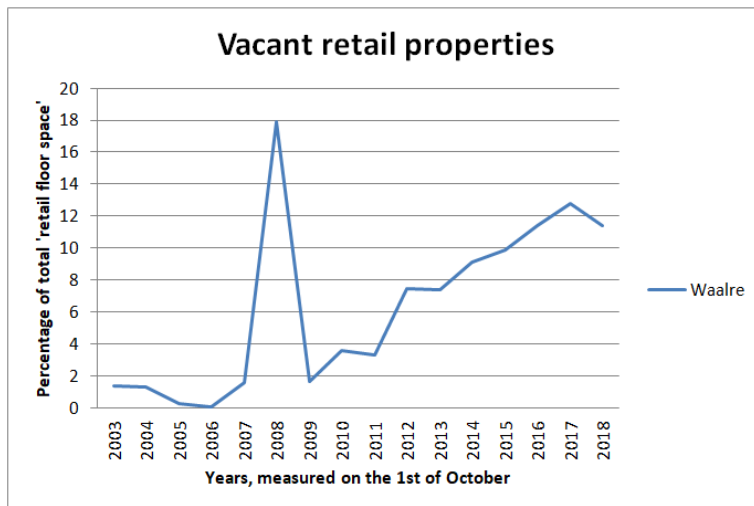


Figure A5.3: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Waalre, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Waalre was home to 1,650 companies. 290 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 17.6% of them. The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.9 km. The average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km also seems average at 3.3 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Municipality of Tilburg

The municipality's history

The municipality of Tilburg is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. Besides the city of Tilburg, the municipality also includes two villages: Berkel-Enschot and Udenhout. Formerly, these two villages both were separate municipalities. With the municipal reorganisation of 1997, they were fused together with Tilburg (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020a). In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, Tilburg is among the four largest cities in the province of Noord-Brabant (together with Breda, 's-Hertogenbosch, and Eindhoven) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). In the 13th century, parts of Tilburg were, together with other villages, part of a (nobility's) lordship. At the end of the 14th century, it became a 'separate' (nobility's) lordship, as it was split up. Originally, the villages were connected through shepherds' routes, as the villages of Tilburg flourished in sheep breeding, and their wool industry grew quickly. Around 1600 A.D., Tilburg had become the most important 'wool city' in Noord-Brabant. This development continued, and in the

18th century Tilburg's wool industry had largely overshadowed Holland's (Noord- and Zuid-Holland's) decaying textile industry. In 1809, Tilburg gained city rights and thus officially became a city, which brought many fast changes to the place. Many new roads and a railway were built to better connect Tilburg to other places. In 1871, Tilburg had 125 wool factories, with a large amount of labourers. At the same time (near the end of the 19th century), Tilburg attracted other types of industry. Much new retail and shops were established in Tilburg. Only at the end of the 19th century, more luxurious 'city houses' were built in the city's core by rich inhabitants, which gave Tilburg a more historical-looking centre. The city was also better connected for trade then, by digging a canal. In the beginning of the 20th century, many workers' houses were built for the many industry labourers, and a city expansion plan was proposed and implemented by the municipality to account for the city's growth. Tilburg suffered heavily during the Second World War, but the amount of destroyed buildings was relatively small compared to other large cities in the Netherlands. After the Second World War, Tilburg's population grew quickly. The wool (and textile) industry slowly disappeared, but their disappearance was compensated by attracting other industries to business parks at the city's borders. The city centre was renovated, and much attention was paid to accessibility and improving the road structure. In the 1990's, the municipality became more concerned with developing shopping streets, parks, and public areas. The city already had much social housing (and former workers' houses), but the municipality wanted to also build high-income housing. Besides that, it wanted to give the former 'industrial city' a strong cultural boost (Gemeente Tilburg, 2013).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Tilburg had a population of 215,521 people. The population density was 1,855 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 0.8%. From the inhabitants, 39.4% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 72.9% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 27.1% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €38,500. The average home value in the municipality was €193,000. From all houses, 50.7% were owner-occupied properties, while 48.6% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Tilburg was 7.0%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Tilburg's vacant retail properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.4.

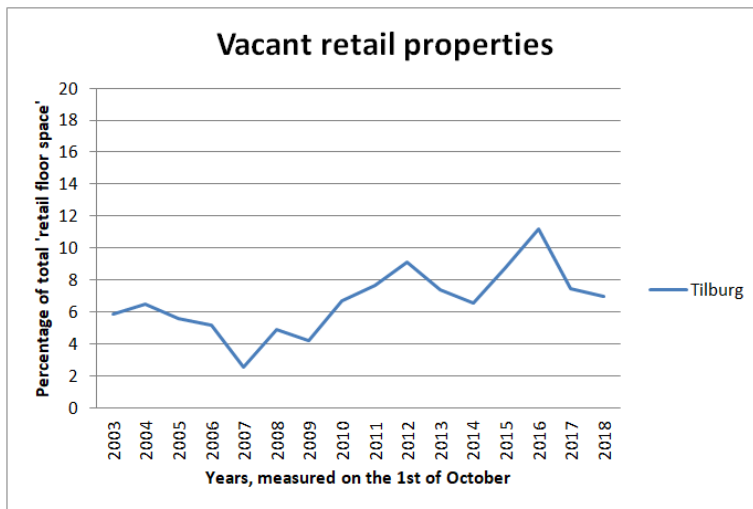


Figure A5.4: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Tilburg, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Tilburg was home to 16,425 companies. 3,750 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 22.8% of them. The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.7 km, while the average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km seems high at 14.4 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Municipality of Bergen op Zoom

The municipality's history

The municipality of Bergen op Zoom is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. Besides the city of Bergen op Zoom, it includes the two smaller villages Halsteren and Lepelstraat. Next to that, it also includes three very small 'townships' Heimolen, Kladde, and Klutsdorp. In the past, these were all separate municipalities (or parts of other, smaller municipalities). With the municipal reorganisation of 1997, they were fused with Bergen op Zoom (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020a). In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, it is a municipality in the category of '10 middle-sized cities' (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). The city of Bergen of Zoom was originally part of large (nobility's) lordship together with the city of Breda. In the year of 1212 A.D., the city of Bergen op Zoom officially gained city rights. In 1287 A.D. it was split with Breda, and became a 'separate' (nobility's) lordship. Also, its city walls were built. In the following centuries, the city was often victim to large fires, which almost destroyed the entire city multiple times. In the 15th century a harbour was built, and many different specialised companies settled near that location, with a prominent place for handcrafts (which were traded internationally). The city built a stronger economy, which largely depended on its biannual markets, which had a regional retail function. However, in the 16th century, floods in the nearby province of Zeeland endangered the harbour's accessibility for a prolonged time, and the establishment of 'permanent' trade fairs in other cities diminished the importance of its large (periodical) markets. Bergen op Zoom still had a strategic location, at a relatively 'high' altitude, surrounded by low water and

swamps, with a harbour and a small land bridge to the province of Zeeland. Because of this, during the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) between the Netherlands and Spain (and subsequent wars), the city was considered the key to conquering Zeeland by all parties. Bergen op Zoom was transformed into a 'garrison town', and permanently housed garrisons and military barracks in the following centuries, until the year of 2004. Still, it had to withstand heavy sieges. Despite strengthening fortifications afterwards, the city was ultimately captured by French troops in 1747, in another war between France and the Netherlands. Large parts of the city were destroyed. For a long time, the city's military history left its mark on its development. In the 17th and 18th centuries, 'madder fishing', pottery and trade became economically very important for Bergen op Zoom. In the 19th century, many new industries settled in Bergen op Zoom. Sugar factories and foundries were established in the city. Later on, chemical factories and refineries were built, which required a better accessibility. In 1899 A.D., a train station was built. The old fortifications were demolished, which made city expansion possible, and opened up economic possibilities. However, the city seems to have remained 'peripheral' in its nature. In 1964, a new harbour was finished, which provided room for new industries. Through the national government's Delta Works, which led to the development of several dams, the city's open connection to the North Sea (through the Oosterschelde) disappeared. Nowadays, the city still has much industry, but in different sectors: chemistry, food, tobacco, and service provision (Geschiedkundige Kring Bergen op Zoom, 2020; OnzeSteden, 2020).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Bergen op Zoom had a population of 66,354 people. The population density was 830 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 0.7%. From the inhabitants, 27.5% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 75.3% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 24.7% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €41,400. The average home value in the municipality was €206,000. From all houses, 56.8% were owner-occupied properties, while 42.7% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Bergen op Zoom was 14.7%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Bergen op Zoom's vacant retail properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.5.

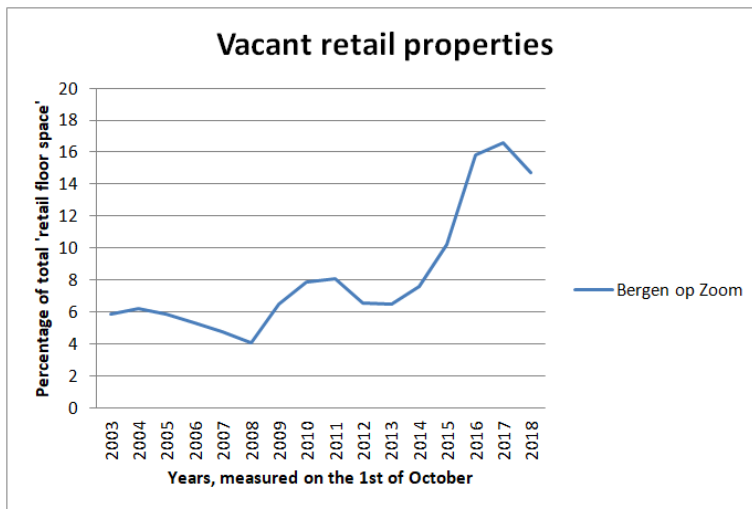


Figure A5.5: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Bergen op Zoom, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Bergen op Zoom was home to 4,900 companies. 1,235 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 25.2% of them. The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.9 km. The average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km also seems (relatively) average for a municipality of that size, at 9.5 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Municipality of Woensdrecht

The municipality's history

The municipality of Woensdrecht is a municipality in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. It contains five villages, namely Hoogerheide, Huijbergen, Ossendrecht, Putte, and Woensdrecht. Originally there were four different municipalities, namely Huijbergen (which consisted of the villages Huijbergen and Hoogerheide), Ossendrecht, Putte, and Woensdrecht. With the municipal reorganisation of 1997, they were all fused together into one 'new' municipality named Woensdrecht (which is not the same municipality as the 'old' Woensdrecht) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020a). The municipality's name of 'Woensdrecht' might not provide an entirely accurate perspective, as it seems to be in contrast with Dutch naming conventions: this municipality is named after its smallest village. Of all five villages, Woensdrecht is the smallest village, while Hoogerheide is the municipality's 'main village'. In the province of Noord-Brabant's classification, it is a smaller municipality in the category of '50 smaller municipalities' (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2018b). All villages seem to have originated as fiefs in medieval times.

However, Woensdrecht seems to be one of the oldest villages, and is rumoured to have originated around 1200 A.D. In the 14th century, both Huijbergen and Woensdrecht were made 'separate' (nobility's) lordships, belonging both to the lord of the city of Breda. Ossendrecht and Huijbergen remained fiefs for a longer time. The village of Hoogerheide further developed as a village built originally from a community around a 'shelter church' for Catholics during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Later on, Hoogerheide developed a monastery. The

village of Huijbergen was originally a village livestock farmers. In 1277 A.D., a change of land ownership in favour of a religious order resulted in a monastery being built there, while a church was subsequently built in 1646 A.D. During the Second World War, large parts of the village were destroyed, including the monastery and church. The village of Woensdrecht prospered between the 15th and 17th centuries, mostly because of shipping and 'madder farming'. Its close location to the water was advantageous for both. During the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) between the Netherlands and Spain, many villages south of Bergen op Zoom (including Woensdrecht) were burned and nearly depopulated. Of all five villages, Woensdrecht seems to have been the only village that 'transformed' very early on into an 'official' municipality (from a former lordship) in 1795. Between 1868-1938, Woensdrecht was also the only village to have a train station (and train connection). The village of Ossendrecht has, for a long time, consisted of six smaller 'townships'. In 1830 a sugar factory was established in Ossendrecht that produced substitute coffee, and many inhabitants worked there. Still the village remained a predominantly agricultural village until halfway during the 20th century. It also had a biscuit factory and a sand-lime brick factory, but these were closed later on. After the Second World War and the North Sea flood disaster of 1953, many inhabitants sought employment in nearby Belgium at large industry- and service-companies in the harbour of Antwerp. Nowadays, Hoogerheide (as part of the municipality of Huijbergen) seems to be the most important village. It has an important airbase and landing strip nearby, where many of the village's inhabitants work in plane repair and – maintenance. It is mentioned that from the 9,000 jobs in the municipality, 3,000 are related to airplane repair. Both Hoogerheide and Huijbergen are known as 'commuter villages'. Many inhabitants actually originate from the city of Bergen op Zoom (Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum, 2020; Gemeente Woensdrecht, 2020).

The municipality's local characteristics

In the reference year of 2018, the municipality of Woensdrecht had a population of 21,800 people. The population density was 238 inhabitants per km². In a year, the municipality's population grew with 0.3%. From the inhabitants, 22.0% are in the so-called 'productive' age group from 20-65 years old. With regards to the place of origin of the inhabitants: 77.2% of them have a Dutch origin (through both parents), while 22.8% of them have a (partly) foreign origin (by either one parent or both parents) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's economic characteristics

Here follows information regarding the local economic situation. In the reference year of 2018, the average disposable income of private households (excluding students) was €43,200. The average home value in the municipality was €233,000. From all houses, 70.5% were owner-occupied properties, while 29.0% were rental properties (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

The municipality's retail sector

In the reference year of 2018, the percentage of vacant retail properties in Woensdrecht was 11.4%, measured in the percentage of 'retail floor space' that was vacant (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). For the development over time of Woensdrecht's vacant retail properties in the period of 2003-2018 (measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'), a reference is made to Figure A5.6.

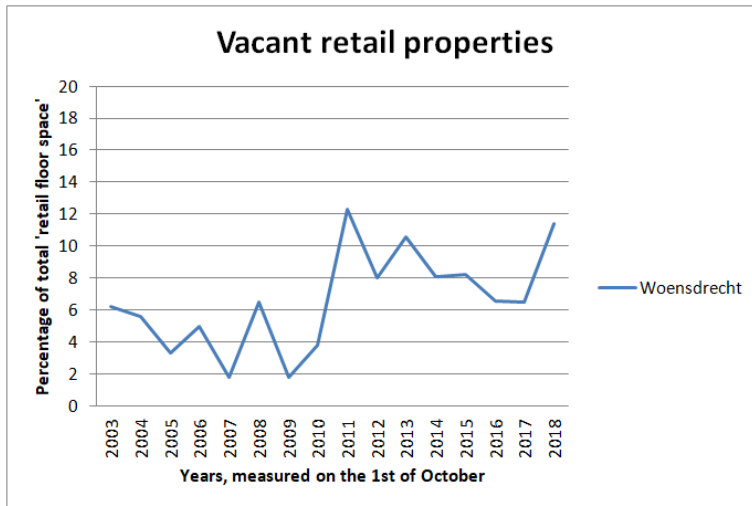


Figure A5.6: Vacant retail properties in the municipality of Woensdrecht, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space'. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Based on the data from Table A6.1 in Appendix 6. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).

In the same year (2018), the municipality of Woensdrecht was home to 1,715 companies. 410 of those companies were in the 'trade and hospitality industry' sector, which amounts to 23.9% of them. The average distance to a large supermarket seems relatively average at 0.7 km. The average amount of large supermarkets within a range of 3 km also seems relatively average at 3.0 supermarkets (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020b).

Appendix 6: Amount of vacant retail properties per municipality

The table included in this appendix, Table A6.1, provides an indication on the amount of vacant retail properties, measured as the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space' (from the amount of 'total floor space') per case (municipality). This was collected for all selected cases (municipalities). This percentage has been measured by the Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus (2020) in the period of 2003-2018, and is displayed for the six selected cases: Eindhoven, Boxtel, Waalre, Tilburg, Bergen op Zoom, and Woensdrecht (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020). The selected cases themselves can be found in chapter '4. Selected cases'.

Year / Cases	Percentage of vacant 'retail floor space' (from the municipality's 'total floor space')					
	Eindhoven	Boxtel	Waalre	Tilburg	Bergen op Zoom	Woensdrecht
2003	6.1	3.9	1.4	5.9	5.9	6.2
2004	6.3	5.1	1.3	6.5	6.2	5.6
2005	4.9	5.2	0.3	5.6	5.9	3.3
2006	6.0	9.3	0.1	5.2	5.3	5.0
2007	7.3	10.1	1.6	2.6	4.8	1.8
2008	6.1	16.2	17.9	4.9	4.1	6.5
2009	7.7	10.5	1.7	4.2	6.5	1.8
2010	9.3	10.8	3.6	6.7	7.9	3.8
2011	10.5	14.8	3.3	7.7	8.1	12.3
2012	8.6	10.5	7.5	9.1	6.6	8.0
2013	9.5	8.3	7.4	7.4	6.5	10.6
2014	10.8	9.4	9.1	6.6	7.6	8.1
2015	11.5	10.5	9.9	8.8	10.2	8.2
2016	11.2	8.3	11.4	11.2	15.8	6.6
2017	10.1	5.3	12.8	7.5	16.6	6.5
2018	9.7	7.1	11.4	7.0	14.7	11.4

Table A6.1: Amount of vacant retail properties per municipality, measured by the percentage of vacant 'retail floor space', in the period of 2003-2018. Derived from Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and Locatus. Edited by Maxim Reinders (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving; Locatus, 2020).