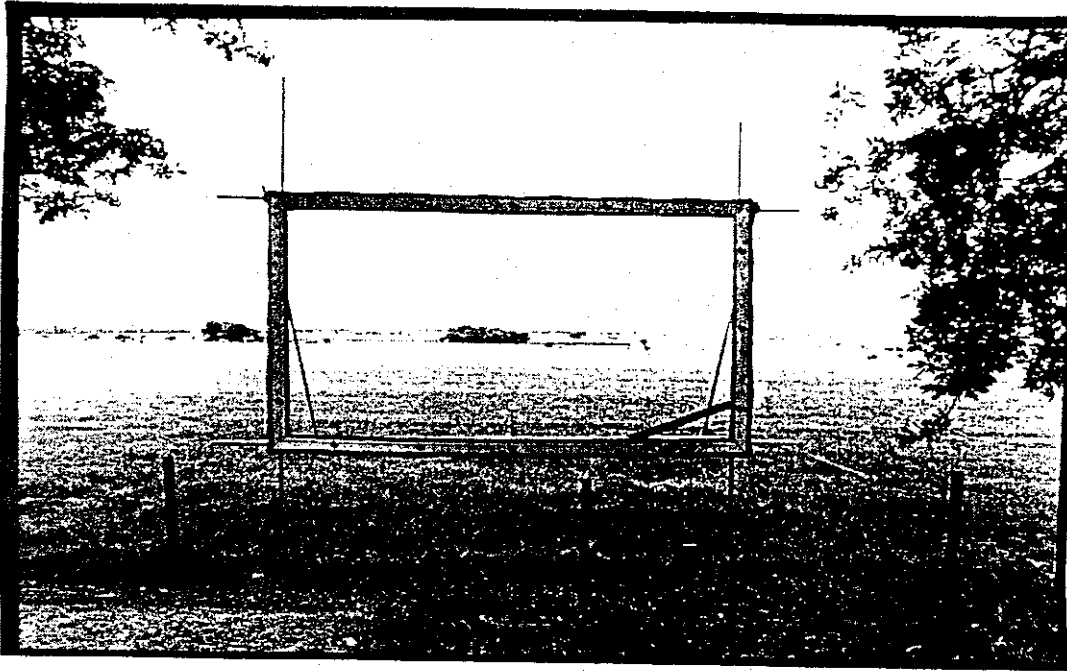


The Landscape of Deliberation

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(Photo courtesy Maarten Hajer)

This view of the Frisian landscape in the northwest of the Netherlands was framed by a group of farmers. They erected this "frame in the fields" to call attention to the beauty and integrity of the cultural landscape and protest to the implementation of a national policy of 'nature development.'¹ Following EU priorities and international policy guidelines, the Dutch government had begun to bring bulldozers and draglines into the rural landscape to open dams and return land ancestors had claimed to nature. This physical manipulation of the landscape disrupted long-standing identities and views of the relationship between nature and progress. The farmers' protest disrupted the implementation of the policy and called into question the commitments it expressed.

What makes this story interesting are the changes in the institutional landscape that accompanied the debate over the development of the physical landscape. The protest opened a dialogue about policy and the Frisian landscape that was "political in the right way." (Rawls) The rubbing of shoulders that occurred in the physical landscape spilled over into political engagement. People with different

¹ For a full account, see Maarten Hajer, "A Frame in the Fields: Policy and the Reinvention of Politics," in M. Hajer and H. Wagenaar (eds) *Deliberative Policy Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

backgrounds and priorities began to speak with and understand one another. Landscape, it seems, provided a shared terrain on which bureaucrats, farmers, shopkeepers, and second-home owners from the IT industry could meet one another, engage their differences, and debate their common place, commitments, and future.

Such terrain is as important as contested landscapes are common. The opening of this story could have unfolded in an industrial landscape at the margins of Los Angeles or New York, the suburbs of Buffalo, the high plains of New Mexico, the forested islands of Haidi Gwail, or the agricultural landscape of the rural Midwest. Questions about the meaning and significance of changes in such landscapes bring into focus the stakes, interests, values, and worldviews of affected organizations, groups, and individuals. The institutional terrain on which these come together, however, most often highlights perceptions of difference and fuels anxieties about identity and the future. Only rarely does this institutional landscape provide ground on which parties can meet one another, engage their differences, and fashion practical ways of dealing with their differences and with the uncertainties raised by change.

This disparity—between the potential of landscape as a common ground for political engagement and the experience of hostility, distrust, and misunderstanding generated by debates over landscape—is especially troubling in our historical context where democratic resources are taxed and conventional practices are every day less effective and less relevant. It raises a set of questions about research and practice and the relationship between them. Together these questions frame the challenge of whether the remaking our physical landscape can also become a renewal of our institutional landscape. This remaking is needed to create the 'constitutional' capacity to treat each moment as potentially transformative and open a working landscape in which individuals can grasp their common identity as "co-founders of the civic order in which they live, which they sustain and augment and pass on to future generations."² It is through such efforts that we can begin to "see [our]selves and each other in association accurately, . . . and recognize . . . that what . . . sustains [our] civic order is not some posthumous power of an original patriarchal Founder . . . but simply [our]selves in [our] shared commitments and interactions."³ It is only in settings that inspire this perspective and through efforts that give it expression that we can "become co-founders of the order with each other, with the original founder(s), and with all the generations in between . . . take responsibility for exercising choice about the order in which . . . [we] live

² Hannah. F. Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.) p. 278 The constitutional notion of treating each moment as transformative is drawn from Frank Michelman, "Law's Republic." *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 97 no.8. July 1988. p. 1527

³ Pitkin, 1984. pp. 276-277

and into which . . . [we] initiate the next generation."⁴ Such development is essential if we are to respond to the real threat to democracy posed by the "forgetfulness that gradually corrupts the composite body . . . a coming to take for granted as 'given' and inevitable what in fact is the product of human action."⁵

One way to begin attend to these responsibilities is to bring these two landscapes into regular and vital association. This is more a work of perspiration than inspiration, and planners and landscape architects can play important roles as researchers and practitioners. The challenge is not to stop with an analysis of the substantive issues on the table, but to have the institutional imagination to recognize and draw out the potential for taking a democratic perspective and fostering institutional development that is available when citizens engage one another in disputes over the development of the landscape.

On the practitioner side this means beginning to act like a researcher and ask questions about the settings in which we work, how institutional commitments shape and stint opportunities to build understanding, and how this understanding can acquire practical shape and force. On the researcher side it means becoming more attentive to and supportive of the variety and vitality of experiments in which thoughtful practitioners are currently engaged. For both it means developing the capacity to see actions as designs and, in this reflexive moment, to share in a common identity as citizens that will allow us to welcome others in the ongoing reworking of landscape of deliberation.

⁴ Pitkin 1984 p. 278

⁵ Pitkin 1984. pp. 276-277.