



WAGENINGEN  
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

## "The man, the administration and the counter-discourse": An analysis of the sudden turn in Dutch nature conservation policy

Land Use Policy

Buijs, A.E.; Mattijssen, T.; Arts, B.J.M.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2014.01.010>

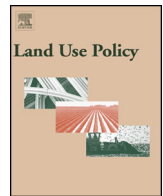
This article is made publicly available in the institutional repository of Wageningen University and Research, under the terms of article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, also known as the Amendment Taverne. This has been done with explicit consent by the author.

Article 25fa states that the author of a short scientific work funded either wholly or partially by Dutch public funds is entitled to make that work publicly available for no consideration following a reasonable period of time after the work was first published, provided that clear reference is made to the source of the first publication of the work.

This publication is distributed under The Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) 'Article 25fa implementation' project. In this project research outputs of researchers employed by Dutch Universities that comply with the legal requirements of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act are distributed online and free of cost or other barriers in institutional repositories. Research outputs are distributed six months after their first online publication in the original published version and with proper attribution to the source of the original publication.

You are permitted to download and use the publication for personal purposes. All rights remain with the author(s) and / or copyright owner(s) of this work. Any use of the publication or parts of it other than authorised under article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright act is prohibited. Wageningen University & Research and the author(s) of this publication shall not be held responsible or liable for any damages resulting from your (re)use of this publication.

For questions regarding the public availability of this article please contact [openscience.library@wur.nl](mailto:openscience.library@wur.nl)



# “The man, the administration and the counter-discourse”: An analysis of the sudden turn in Dutch nature conservation policy



Arjen Buijs\*, Thomas Mattijssen, Bas Arts

Wageningen University, P.O. Box 47, 6700 AC Wageningen, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 22 August 2013

Received in revised form 6 December 2013

Accepted 18 January 2014

### Keywords:

Nature conservation

Policy change

EU

Netherlands

Discursive institutionalism

Public participation

## ABSTRACT

The Netherlands were at the forefront of European nature conservation policy until recently. For years, a stable ‘social contract’ around Dutch nature conservation existed. To the surprise of many, this stability suddenly disappeared and Dutch nature policy has taken a dramatic shift with changing discourses on nature conservation, the halting of implementation of several key-policies and budget cuts up to 70%. This paper engages with discursive-institutionalism to understand such abrupt institutional changes through emerging ideas and discourses that reshape and undermine existing institutional arrangements. We show how the institutionalization of policy not only engendered but also restricted the impact of critical discourses in the 1990s and 2000s. However, critical discourses eventually played an important role in the sudden turn in nature conservation policy. The rise of a general populist discourse and the economic crisis contributed to the credibility of critical discourses and their translation into popular frames and storylines. Authoritative actors such as a new State Secretary opened up popular media for the critical discourses and contributed to their resonance among larger audiences. As such, the man and his new administration successfully used already existing counter-discourses to de-legitimise nature policy and break down important institutional arrangements at a pace unseen in Dutch politics. Adding a discursive element to institutionalism provides for analytical tools to understand change from both external as well as internal forces. In turn, enriching discourse theory with insights from neo-institutionalism helps to evaluate which ideas and discourses become materialized in policy and practice.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## A sudden turn in Dutch nature policy

Until recently, the Netherlands was seen by many as one of the leading nations in European nature conservation policy. It has played an important role in the development of a common European nature policy (Van den Top and Van der Zouwen, 2002). The Natura 2000 ecological network was inspired by experiences with the Dutch *National Ecological Network* (NEN) (Keulartz, 2009) and the Netherlands played a pioneering role in the development of the habitat-directive (Van den Top and Van der Zouwen, 2002).

In the Netherlands, the realization of this comprehensive ecological network has been the primary focus of nature policy for 20 years from 1990 onwards. During these years, nature conservation policy has been relatively stable (De Lijster, 2011). Most Dutch societal and political actors agreed upon the importance and shape of nature policy. Substantial public money was invested to develop and connect natural areas in order to implement the NEN and Natura 2000, and nature conservation policy in the Netherlands

became increasingly institutionalized (Arnouts, 2010). Public support was high and nature conservation seemed to be safeguarded in a stable political environment. A robust ‘social contract’ around Dutch nature conservation seemed to exist.

To the surprise of many, this stability suddenly disappeared after national elections in 2010. Since then, Dutch nature conservation policy has taken a dramatic shift. A right wing coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and Liberal-conservatives (VVD) with confidence supply from a conservative populist party (PVV) came into power. Many aspects of Dutch nature conservation policy that had been firmly institutionalized on both the national and regional level were suddenly challenged. Policy views on the type of nature worthy of protection changed significantly; budgets for nature conservation were cut up to 70%; a new, much less strict nature protection law was initiated; and the further development of important elements of the Natura 2000 network was postponed or halted. Leading nature conservation organizations and regional politicians were in shock about how such a sudden turn over could have happened (Buijs et al., 2013). The ‘social contract’ – once believed to be stable – became undermined in just a few months.

Guided by a discursive-institutional framework (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Schmidt, 2008), we try to understand the processes behind this sudden turn in Dutch nature policy. This paper is

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 317 481661.

E-mail addresses: [Arjen.buijs@wur.nl](mailto:Arjen.buijs@wur.nl) (A. Buijs),

[Thomas.mattijssen@wur.nl](mailto:Thomas.mattijssen@wur.nl) (T. Mattijssen), [bas.arts@wur.nl](mailto:bas.arts@wur.nl) (B. Arts).

based on multi-methods and multi-data. It is based on literature (e.g. Beunen et al., 2013; Buijs et al., 2011; Turnhout and van der Zouwen, 2010; Van Der Windt, 2012), document analyses (Buijs et al., 2013), interviews with employees of nature conservation organizations, informant talks with governmental officials, participation of the authors in several workshops on the topic, consultancy research for the Dutch environmental planning agency (Arnouts et al., 2012), and membership of one of the authors in an official advisory committee for the new Dutch Law and policy on nature conservation (RLI, 2013). The discourses we distinguish are also based on formal discourse analysis of Dutch media and policy documents between 2008 and 2012 (Buijs et al., 2012).

### Discursive institutionalism

To analyse the sudden turn in Dutch nature policy, we need a framework that connects and explains institutional stability ('the social contract') as well as abrupt policy change (halting of implementation, severe budget cuts, new ideas about 'appropriate' nature conservation). Discursive-institutionalism exactly promises to do this by analysing institutional crises from an ideational perspective (Schmidt, 2008). Abrupt institutional changes are explained by emerging or undercurrent ideas and discourses that reshape or undermine existing institutional arrangements.

Discursive-institutionalism is a relatively new branch in neo-institutionalism (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Blyth, 2002; Hay, 2006; Philips et al., 2004; Schmidt, 2005, 2008). It tries to overcome some of the 'orthodoxies' in institutional thinking, like path-dependency or institutional breakdown (Peters et al., 2005), and builds upon neo-institutional literature on social change to avoid such crude distinctions of either continuity or change (Treack and Thelen, 2005). For example, it adds the concept of 'path shaping' – that refers to gradual transformation *without* immediate breakdowns – to the one of path-dependency (Hay, 2006). And it wishes to theoretically reflect upon institutional crises and abrupt institutional changes that we observe in the world around us (Schmidt, 2005). Examples are the fall of the Berlin Wall or the current Euro crisis, changes which 'orthodox' institutionalism finds hard to explain and therefore often relates to external shock events. In understanding such (sudden) path formations, discursive institutionalism however emphasizes the role of new, emerging or counter ideas and discourses that – under certain conditions (see below) – can undermine or reshape existing institutional arrangements. In doing so, the approach bridges the gap between institutional theory and discourse theory (Arts and Buizer, 2009). Whereas it brings in new dynamics and discursive understandings in institutional thinking, it helps discourse theory to go beyond mere ideas, concepts and communication and to refocus on their (selective) institutionalization and materialization.

Analytically, though, the approach makes a clear distinction between discourses on the one hand and institutions on the other, whereby both are considered to be mutually constitutive in an empirical sense (Buizer, 2008). To visualize this point of departure, (Den Besten et al., *in press*) introduce the so-called 'discursive-institutional spiral' in which new ideas and actors force discursive responses and institutional changes in subsequent rounds of public deliberation and policy making. Generally, although various authors might differ on details, discourses are seen as shared – and at the same time contested – ideas about the social and material worlds in communicative devices (texts, speeches, narratives, etc.) and institutions as anchored ideas in formal and informal regulatory arrangements and practices (laws, rules, norms, standards, procedures, etc., both on paper and in use) (Cleaver, 2002; Habermas, 1996; North, 1991; Schmidt, 2008). With such 'analytical dualism' (Archer, 1996), discursive institutionalism departs

from post-structuralist discourse theory that emphasizes the unity of 'the ideational' and 'the material' in discursive regimes (Foucault, 1994; Hajer, 1995; Howarth, 2000). It does so because it prefers analytical clarity over holistic description. In addition, it puts much more emphasis on the *interactive* part of discourse formation and hence on the (potential) intervening role of 'discursive agency' in institutional dynamics than post-structuralism generally does (Giddens, 1984). Two agency roles can be distinguished here: a *communicative* role of agencies in public deliberation and a *coordinative* role in policy making (Schmidt, 2008, 2011).

The key question is of course under what conditions institutional change through ideas, discourses and agencies can take place. In the literature (particularly Arts and Buizer, 2009, Philips et al., 2004 and Schmidt, 2008, 2011), the following circumstances are considered most relevant: (a) the new discourses cover 'existential' and 'timely' topics, hence resonate with a larger and concerned (but not necessarily visible) audience; (b) they appear (reasonably) credible and coherent to that audience; (c) they are carried and strongly advocated by authoritative and sentient actors ('discursive agencies'); (d) they take the form of popular *genres* or *story lines* (i.e. transcend the language of specific individuals or organizations); and (e) the legitimacy of the current discourse and related institutional arrangements are under pressure. Under such conditions, the new discourse will become dominant over the preceding one, and force (some) institutional change. Such 'dominance' can be assessed through discourse analysis of policy documents, speeches and media (see Hajer, 1995 for assessing discursive dominance as a general methodology and see (Buijs et al., 2012). for assessing discursive change in Dutch nature policy).

Below, this paper develops an argument in line with the above overview of discursive-institutionalism. It will first describe the 1990 discourse on nature conservation in the Netherlands, and then analyses where it came from and how it became institutionalized and dominant in the years thereafter. Secondly, it will show how critical discourses already emerged during its dominance, but that these could only mature when Dutch socio-political circumstances had changed. Finally, the paper analyses the resulting discursive struggles and the (partial) de-institutionalization of the old consensus and social contract around Dutch nature conservation. In this drama, both structural properties and discursive agencies played their roles (Giddens, 1981): (1) old and new as well as scientific and popular ideas on managing nature; (2) the installation of the administration usually called 'Rutte-1' in 2010 that followed a strict budgetary approach to government; and (3) 'the man' called Bleker – the former Secretary of State of the administration Rutte-1 – who played a coordinative role in translating critical discourses into new nature conservation policy.

### The rise of the conservation/development discourse

The founding of the Society for preservation of nature monuments (Natuurmonumenten) in 1905 is often seen as the start of nature protection in the Netherlands. At start, nature protection was mostly a combination of private enterprise and civil society (De Lijster, 2011; Van der Windt, 1995). Although from the 1940s the involvement of the national government started to increase, only from 1970 onwards (Van der Windt, 1995) the national government became dominant and created several policies to safeguard the protection of nature and of natural areas (Arnouts, 2010). These policies and the practice in Dutch nature protection were mostly focused on the preservation of existing 'nature monuments' and were rather 'defensive' in nature (Rientjes, 2002; van der Windt et al., 2007). In short one could say that up to World War II the *preservation* discourse on nature conservation was dominant in the Netherlands, which gradually turned into a discourse on

conservation through management discourse in the 1980s, influenced among others by the influential biologist and conservationist Victor Westhoff (but see [Van der Windt, 1995](#) for a more detailed and nuanced description of these developments).

In the late 1970s, a new ecological vision on nature emerged in the Netherlands ([de Jong, 1999](#)), also related to the unexpected and spontaneous development of nature in the reclaimed polders of the Oostvaardersplassen ([Van der Heijden, 2005](#)) and the growing societal importance of nature protection ([Kloek et al., 2013](#)). Based on specific approaches within ecology, such as evolutionary ecology and restoration ecology ([Cairns and Heckman, 1996](#)), this vision put much more emphasis on ecological processes, the restoration of natural areas, creating ecological networks (the NEN) and renewed efforts to combine agriculture with nature conservation. A shift in thinking about nature and its management took place: the focus on protecting existing nature expanded to also include efforts to restore or develop new nature. The focus also shifted from individual nature sites to a network of interconnected areas; and from separation between nature and agriculture to more integration between the two, for example in agro-environmental schemes. With the concept of the NEN, formally introduced in 1990, an explicit aim was expressed for nature development in “degraded land” and the interconnecting of different nature areas through ecological corridors. This concept had enormous mobilizing power because of its more ‘offensive’ approach ([Keulartz, 2009](#)) and because of the recent success stories of ecological restoration, which led to an increased emphasis on a ‘wilderness’ image of nature ([van der Windt et al., 2007](#)).

However, actual nature conservation practices were much more diverse and did not only focus on nature development. Next to impressive ecological restoration projects, also nature conservation of farm land and other innovative and practical combinations of nature conservation with other functions remained important. Ideas rose about a connection between nature and economy to create win-win situations (such as in river basins, where for example gravel extraction and nature development can be combined) and in the late 1980s and early 1990s visions on international governance of nature and a common European nature policy also become strongly embedded. This combination of nature development and “New nature” with nature conservation on agricultural land and in many forests combines both traditional conservation methods as well as nature restoration projects. We thus call this discourse the *conservation/development discourse* (see also [Van der Heijden, 2005](#) for a more detailed description of these discourses).

This conservation/development discourse proved highly successful. In politics, society and among many economic stakeholders the importance of nature conservation, and partly of nature development, was widely acknowledged from the 1980s onwards. The ambivalence of the conservation/development discourse also contributed to its success. The broad ambition of this discourse to ‘improve nature qualities’ ([Beunen and Hagens, 2009](#)) left room for different types of nature management: from hands-off management to intensive human intervention and agrarian nature management ([De Lijster, 2011](#)). This open ambition was supported by many people as long as it did not conflict with their own interests. In fact, people could often interpret the mainstream discourse in such a way as to link it best to their own interests ([Beunen and Hagens, 2009](#)). Although in actual management practices the implementation of these visions was frequently challenged ([Buijs et al., 2011](#)), the discourse in itself was supported by most stakeholders and was referred to most in e.g. policy documents ([van der Windt et al., 2007](#)). It thus had become the dominant discourse in Dutch nature policy.

## Institutionalization of the discourse

Probably the most remarkable effect of the rise of the new discourse was the swift institutionalization of crucial elements of this discourse in the early 1990s, such as the development of new nature, a focus on species and biodiversity. The discourse was supported by a broad, strong and stable coalition of actors, including the ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries (nowadays merged into the Ministry of Economic Affairs), provincial governments, leading ecologists and most nature conservation organizations. After some time also several societal groups joined this coalition, such as the agrarian councils (LTO), the influential Royal Dutch Touring Club (ANWB) and regional recreational organizations ([Van der Heijden, 2005](#)). Economical actors were also strategically involved in the coalition by creating economically interesting options, for example by the extraction of gravel in floodplains along the rivers Rhine and Meuse ([Wiering and Driessen, 2001](#)). With this strong coalition behind it, the conservation/development discourse quickly gained dominance in discussions on nature management and succeeded maintaining this position for a long time.

Not only was the conservation/development discourse quickly adopted by many important actors, within a few years it also resulted in important institutional changes. First of all, the discourse was formalized in the first Dutch Nature Policy Plan in 1990. With this plan, the development of a Dutch National Ecological Network (NEN) was formalized as the official and primary goal for Dutch nature policy ([LNV, 1990](#)). This not only marked a shift in policy goals, it also marked a much more prominent and pro-active role of the government in nature policy and management. Furthermore, also local and regional governments as well as semi-governmental institutions such as Waterboards became much more explicitly engaged in Dutch nature policy ([Jacobs and Buijs, 2011](#)). This added further impetus for combining diverse functions such as nature conservation, water management, agriculture and recreation ([Wiering and Driessen, 2001](#)). The changes in goals and methods propagated in the new discourse were formalized and the pro-active strategy of the discourse with an active role for government and nature conservation organizations to *develop* new nature were integrated into official policy. For example, despite significant resistance from national and local agricultural stakeholders, 18 official National Parks have been designated between 1990 and 2006, most of them explicitly aiming for ecological goals in line with the conservation/development discourse.

The new discourse also became institutionalized in the traditionally strongly embedded practice of re-allotment (redistribution of land). This Dutch planning instrument, which is based on a long history of agricultural modernization, has been more and more transformed to include, and sometimes explicitly focus on, ecological restoration and nature conservation. Numerous regional planning processes have emerged over the years, combining ecological restoration projects with water management, agricultural restructuring, and recreation. Such processes often include (local) non-governmental stakeholders, also on nature and environment ([Derkzen, 2008](#); [Mattijssen et al., submitted for publication](#)). Related to the economically critical situation of Dutch agriculture in the 1990s, successful trade-offs were made between agriculture and ecological restoration, in which many farmers voluntarily moved or stopped ([Horlings and Gersie, 1995](#)). These practices contributed to the incorporation of the discourse in local institutions and contributed to the further distribution of the discourse among local stakeholders.

Furthermore, nature conservation organizations increased their embeddedness in society. Between 1990 and 2005, their membership doubled up to two million members. If individual memberships are seen as family memberships and also local green

organizations are counted, almost half of the Dutch population is a member of or donor to a nature conservation organization (Nooteboom, 2006). This political and societal institutionalization gave these organizations a powerful position in negotiations, both on the policy level and in the implementation of spatial policy. Indeed, NGO's focusing on nature conservation in the Netherlands have a strong tradition of aligning with powerful institutions, such as regional and national governments, agricultural organizations, water boards and economic elites. Typical is the recruitment of the head of one of the most important Dutch Waterboards for director of the Society for preservation of nature monuments (Natuurmonumenten), the biggest green NGO in the Netherlands, in 2003. As a result of this institutional embeddedness, much of the agricultural land bought by Dutch government to enhance the ecological network has been turned over to nature conservation organizations for free, or through a long term and free lease contract.

### Rise of critical discourses

Ever since the institutionalization of the conservation/development discourse, also critical discourses, or counter-discourses emerged (e.g. Keulartz and Korthals, 1997). Primarily, these critical discourses argued against the pro-active strategy of the newly established Dutch nature policy which threatened existing cultural landscapes, such as the well-known, highly appreciated but highly modified Dutch floodplains (Wiering and Arts, 2006). However, the conservation/development discourse was so strong, in policy, ecological sciences as well as in popular media, that critical discourses had little influence on actual policies.

Nevertheless, the further institutionalization and especially juridification of Dutch nature policy from 2000 onwards has fuelled these critical discourses. As in several other member states, the legalist interpretation of Natura 2000 as well as of the Birds and Habitat Directives increasingly led to a rather formalist and sometimes rigid implementation of general conservation goals into local management plans. This significantly limited participatory spaces for stakeholders outside the ecological domain (Beunen et al., 2013; Stoll-Kleemann, 2001). Furthermore, the designation and delineation of the actual Nature 2000 areas was decided by the Ministry, also with very little participatory space (Ferranti et al., 2010). In the actual implementation, ecological criteria were dominant and ecological knowledge was privileged over local knowledge (Buijs et al., 2011). Based on the Birds and Habitat Directives, but even more so on the Dutch 'nature conservation act' and 'flora and fauna act', nature conservationists were increasingly able to legally challenge new housing or infrastructure projects. As a result of this most actors started to realize that the implemented nature policy goals could very well conflict with economic developments, be it agriculture or otherwise (Beunen et al., 2013). This fuelled prior critical debates and led to the emergence of new critical discourses.

Based on discourse analyses of local and national media between 2008 and 2012, Buijs et al. (2013) distinguish between three critical discourses about nature policy in the Netherlands (next to two supportive discourses): a local ownership discourse, a lock on development discourse and a populist discourse. One discourse postulated a mismatch between the goals of formalized nature policy and perceptions of local residents. It emphasized that in the implementation of nature policy, little attention was paid to the views on nature and interests of local stakeholders. Although usually nature organizations were the owners of the areas, residents claimed that policies directly impact their daily life world and argued for moral or experiential ownership. Critics also increasingly challenged the strong focus of nature policy on ecological criteria and argued for a more flexible implementation of policy goals, taking into account scenic values of nature and the

attachment of local communities to the natural or cultural landscapes. Especially the cut of forests and the ecological restoration of agricultural land were debated. In the remainder of this paper, we will refer to this critical discourse as the *local ownership* discourse. At first, this critical discourse was predominantly expressed at the local level.

A second critical discourse focused on the alleged contradiction between ecology and economy. It depicted nature policy as being 'too strict' and denying the importance of regional and national economic development. Critical media and economic interest groups increasingly reported about 'the lock' on economic development by Dutch nature policy goals and EU directives such as the habitat directive (Beunen et al., 2013). This discourse criticized Dutch nature policy as being 'paralysing', 'rigid' and 'strongly focused on legal examination'. Nature policy was seen as conflicting with economic activities and interests such as agriculture, infrastructure and housing, also leading to uncertainty for stakeholders involved because of its complex character (Wit et al., 2011). We will refer to this discourse as the *lock on development* discourse.

The third, most marginal but at the same time most critical discourse is a *populist* discourse that draws on broader populist notions of a gap between government and citizens and depicts nature policy as an ivory tower in which there is no place for citizens, resource users and society. Nature conservation is depicted as a leftist-hobby and nature conservation organizations and government are seen as inextricably interrelated. Consequently, general distrust in governments is also applied to Dutch nature conservation organizations and their policies.

While previously critical discourses were mainly heard at the local level of policy implementation, these criticisms could increasingly also be heard on the national level. From 2000 onwards, the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of Dutch nature policy increasingly became challenged (RLI, 2013). The lack of goal achievement in realizing biodiversity protection targets, the large amounts of money spent on the preservation of some individual species and the loss of support from economic sectors and the public at large were emerging themes in media and politics. In contrast and perhaps in blindness to these critiques, the strong belief in the rightfulness of the conservation/development discourse resulted in a rather self-referential culture within conservation organizations and policy and a self-confident attitude of many conservationists (Dekker, 2011). Critical arguments were delegitimized as 'emotionally driven' (Buijs and Lawrence, 2013), as being based on lack of ecological knowledge (Turnhout et al., 2010) or on a lack of understanding of the importance of biodiversity protection (Buijs et al., 2008). Thus, despite the rise of these critical discourses, the discursive struggle between them and the dominant conservation/development discourse was still largely below the radar of many conservationists (Buijs et al., 2013). Despite their growing resonance in society, the critical discourses were not yet able to seriously threaten the dominant discourse. Consequently, the conservation/development discourse remained dominant in policy and management until 2010.

### Discursive struggle and de-institutionalization

This all changed drastically with the installation of a new government coalition, often referred to as the 'Rutte 1' administration (name of the prime minister), in October 2010. The new coalition, based on the liberal-conservative party (VVD) and the Christian democrats (CDA) with confidence supply from the Populist-conservatives party (PVV), was seen as the most right wing government the Netherlands had seen since the Second World War. Moreover, these parties had expressed themselves the most critical towards current nature policy and management in

the Netherlands, both in speech and in their party programmes (although not dealt with at length). Henk Bleker, a longstanding and unconventional critic of prior nature conservation policies, was appointed as State Secretary of agriculture and nature conservation. Both his appointment and the political constellation in general resulted in dramatic changes in Dutch nature policy. Almost immediately rhetoric (discourse) changed and soon also well-established institutional arrangements were dismantled.

First of all, Henk Bleker explicitly associated himself with two critical discourses about nature policy as describe above: the *local ownership* discourse and the *lock on development* discourse (Buijs et al., 2013). Furthermore, while the populist-conservatives party (PVV) for a long time had aligned itself with the critical populist discourse, their confidence support to the new government made their vision on nature conservation much more visible in national media. Strategically aligning himself with these critical discourses, Bleker stressed the need to acknowledge the interests and views of local stakeholders as well as the need to limit the negative economic effects of nature policy (Buijs et al., 2012). The economic crisis of 2008 certainly added to the resonance of economic arguments against the conservation/development discourse. The rhetoric of Bleker was also critical towards existing conservation NGO's. He stated that (European) nature policy has 'very high ambitions, very strict demands (...) with the consequence that the surrounding countryside is economically closed' (Radio-1, 2011). The populist discourse inspired him to speak of 'elite-nature', which became a moniker for criticisms on existing 'technocratic' nature practices. According to Bleker: 'there is only a small elite which can really enjoy the particularities of nature you should be able to find in Natura 2000 areas. One almost need to have studied for this to enjoy it' (Horst, 2011). In general, the administration of Rutte-1 presented nature conservation as 'a leftish hobby that costs too much' (Beunen et al., 2013, p. 285) and challenged the strict, 'paralysing', criteria which were set for Natura 2000 and by national nature policies.

With this, they explicitly challenged the social contract based on the conservation/development discourse. Until then, the dominant coalition had been successful in de-legitimizing – or even ignoring – the critical discourses as being based primarily on personal interests, narrow economic argumentation or limited knowledge on function and complexity of biodiversity. Bleker did not only provide a forum for the critical discourses in the national arena, but also actively aligned with these discourses and used them in his political attempts to change Dutch nature policy. In this, he successfully used the cultural resonance (Buijs et al., 2011) of critical discourses with large sections of the Dutch population and institutional stakeholders. This resulted in the de-legitimization of the nature policy discourse that had been dominant for two decades (De Lijster, 2011).

Furthermore, Bleker also started with institutionalizing his alternative view on nature policy in legislation, official policy priorities, budget cuts, and decentralization. First of all, a new law on nature conservation was prepared, in which the number of protected species would be decreased significantly and in which the designation of "areas of outstanding natural beauty" would be cancelled (Zaken, 2011b). Furthermore, the number of protected areas under Natura 2000 would be limited, the planned area covered by the National Ecological Network would be diminished with around 20% and the realization of this Network would be delayed (Zaken, 2011a). On a more concrete level, an important Belgium–Dutch ecological restoration project in the Schelde estuary was halted and the development of one of the largest regional ecological restoration projects (Oostvaarderswold) was prohibited by the new administration via a court case. This change in policy was combined with large budget cuts on nature conservation, as the total state budget for nature conservation was more than halved. For the National Forest Service, the largest Dutch nature conservation agency, this

recess amounted up to 70% of their total budget and for the realization of the NEN, the government budget was cut with about 66% (van Lieshout, 2011). Although the difficult economic circumstances motivated cutbacks in many policy fields, and the Rutte 1 administration followed a rather strict budgetary approach to address the financial crisis, hardly any other field was as heavily and disproportionately affected as nature policy. Therefore we conclude that on top of the 'needed' budget cuts in general, nature conservation policy was additionally hit for purely ideological reasons.

The institutionalization of nature policy on national and provincial levels also changed: responsibilities for nature were further decentralized from the national state to the provincial level and provinces were given more freedom on the designation of nature areas and in the realization of the NEN. Also, while the policy domains of nature conservation and agriculture previously formed a separate ministry together, these domains were subordinated under a newly formed ministry of economic affairs, agriculture and innovation in 2010.

Initially, most nature conservation organizations seemed in shock. The conservation/development discourse seemed to be supported by so many stakeholders, the discourse coalition so all-encompassing and its views embedded in so many institutions from the European to the local level that despite the rise of critical discourses, the sudden and radical shift in policy came as a total surprise to many actors (Dekker, 2011). As a first reaction, nature conservation organizations tried to mobilize public protest against the new policies, and they were able to gather quite some support in their actions. For example, a record number of 11,000 registered requests was made on the official consultation website of the Dutch government, where the number of reactions is usually limited to a couple of hundreds (Buijs et al., 2013). Also, 40,000 people came to the national action-day 'Heart for Nature', 75,000 people supported the action 'if you love nature', and 25,000 trees were sold and planted as a form of protest (Buijs et al., 2013).

As a result of the discursive and institutional changes at government levels, the pre-existing social contract on nature conservation broke down. First of all because the ministry itself, until recently strongly connected to the coalition behind it, distanced itself from it. Also outside government, the coalition broke down. For example, on the national level the influential ANWB formulated an alternative vision on future nature policy by stating that nature conservation organizations should merge into one all-encompassing agency for Dutch nature conservation and suggesting that further cuts are feasible. On the local level, many agricultural actors, who previously often engaged in strategic exchanges with nature conservation organizations and partly subscribed to the conservation/development discourse when it still had its dominance, now more and more distanced themselves from it. And while previously joint campaigns had been organized to promote the protection and development of natural landscapes, the abovementioned public protests were mostly organized and supported by nature conservation organizations only.

In general, a clear tendency towards polarization of discourses and actors could be witnessed (Buijs et al., 2013). The critical discourses became more dominant and heard, also in the media. But also the conservation/development discourse itself seems to have changed. First of all, it adapted a sharper tone. Previously, the discourse was rather nuanced and self-confident. After the policy change, it changed into a much more offensive rhetoric, accusing government and State Secretary of 'wasting nature' and labelling the new policy as the 'destruction' of nature protection in the Netherlands. As one representative of a nature conservation NGO said: 'this government does not understand the importance of nature' (Buijs et al., 2013). Furthermore, the Society for preservation of nature monuments started to rethink their goals and

mission. While previously aligning with governmental policies, they now explicitly position themselves as a social movement, based on 700,000 individual memberships (*Natuurmonumenten, 2013*). In doing so, they try to challenge the criticism of being too government-oriented, top-down or elitist. Significantly, while the former director of the Society had a strong governmental background and network, the recently appointed director is a former fund raiser of a semi-commercial company. Furthermore, institutional changes seem to be initiated too. The National Forest Service, a semi-governmental nature conservation agency, intensified its search for new economic outputs of forests and nature areas and even explicitly tried to re-position itself more outside the governmental realm (*Marijnissen, 2012*).

### Discursive-institutional dynamics in Dutch nature policy

In the above, we have shown how changes in discourses about nature conservation in the Netherlands became incorporated and stabilized into institutional arrangements. However, we also showed that such institutionalization is not self-evident. This holds true for the two discursive-institutional shifts in the last 25 years in the Netherlands: the rise of the conservation/development discourse in the 1980s/1990s and the rise of the critical discourse(s) in the 2000s/2010s. In the 1990s, the change in discourse towards the conservation/development discourse including ecological restoration projects was quickly institutionalized into official policies and laws as well as into practices of many conservation organizations. Over time, it also gained support of a broad coalition. Meanwhile, the critical discourses emerging after 2000 were much less influential and did not seriously challenge the dominant discourse for a long time. This could only happen after the rise of political populism and the emergence of the economic crisis in the Netherlands in the late 2000s. As a consequence, institutional arrangements concerning nature conservation policy (laws, regulations, bureaucracies) are currently being reformed. It is exactly these different alignments between discourse and institutions that substantiate in our view the merits of analytically distinguishing between the two. Moreover, the pattern we found in Dutch nature policy aligns very well with the ‘Discursive-Institutional Spiral’ as suggested by (*Den Besten et al., in press*). In this model, discursive dynamics and processes of de- and re-institutionalization alternate over time.

Based on such analytic dualism and the discursive-institutional spiral, our approach emphasizes the role of counter discourses that can reshape existing institutional arrangements and the influence that robust institutions might have on the (lack of) emergence and dispersion of new discourses. Indeed, these processes can be recognized in what happened in the Netherlands around 2010. First of all, the swift institutionalization of the conservation/development discourse into eventually quite strict rules and regulations in the 1990s engendered critical discourses. The strong juridification led to frustration among economic actors, such as farmers and business organizations. The self-referential culture within conservation organizations and policy resulted in negative stereotypes of nature conservationists as ‘arrogant technocrats’ by parts of the general public. The critical discourses on *local ownership* and *lock on development* were thus a direct result of what may be called an “over-institutionalization” of Dutch nature policy in the 2000s.

Meanwhile, the strong institutionalization of the conservation/development discourse and the broad coalition behind it (including most scientists, politicians, NGOs and even most of the Dutch media) explicitly or implicitly limited discursive space for critical discourses to significantly influence Dutch nature conservation practices for a long time. Indeed institutions not only engendered the rise of critical discourses but also restricted their impact on policy.

However, as suggested by discursive institutionalism, critical discourses eventually played an important role in the sudden turn in nature policy in 2010. But why did it take over 10 years before such critical discourses became influential? And why could it then suddenly, within a period of one-and-a-half year, gain dominance? Discursive institutionalism suggests five theoretically relevant factors that may increase the impact of critical discourse on institutions (see section “Discursive institutionalism”): the credibility of critical discourses; translation into popular frames and storylines; resonance among larger audiences; the persuasive power of authoritative actors supporting alternative visions; and an increased pressure on the legitimacy of existing discourses and institutional arrangements. We will elaborate on all suggestions.

First of all, the credibility of the critical discourses was limited when they emerged at the end of the 1990s. In those economically booming times, the dominant view of the public was that ecology is under constant threat, and needs protection against economic forces. Strict regulation was thus supported by large segments of the public (*de Bakker et al., 2007*). Furthermore, agriculture was looked upon very critically, related to diseases, animal health and environmental degradation. The credibility of economic arguments in relation to nature policy only raised after the economic crisis has put economy more to the front, resulting in a rise of credibility. Furthermore, the agricultural sector (partly) regained its formerly strong position (*Dekker, 2011*). It recovered economically and its public image also seemed to improve, both as keepers of the highly appreciated agricultural landscape as well as efficient providers of “food for the world”.

Second, discursive institutionalism also focuses on the power of reframing dominant discourses as impetus for change (*Raitio, 2013*). Indeed, the economic crisis provided a tempting storyline for the promotion of the *lock on development discourse*. The rise of a general populist discourse in the Netherlands after 2001, related to the Dutch politicians Geert Wilders and Pim Fortuyn, provided a second appealing storyline for critical discourses on nature policy. In this populist discourse, government and governmental organizations were critically depicted as arrogant and not in touch with “ordinary people” (*Vossen, 2010*). In this light, the strong institutionalization of Dutch nature conservation policies and nature conservation NGOs turned into a disadvantage: as they were closely intertwined with policy, criticism on policy and governance was easily transposed on nature conservation and nature conservation organizations (*Buijs et al., 2013*).

Despite the successful development of coherent storylines, critical discourses remained unheard for a long term. Only until the late 2000s dominant media opened up for such critics, boosted by social conflicts on economic developments being halted by small and unknown but protected species such as the hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*), Natterjack Toad (*Epidalea calamita*) or Desmoulin’s whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*). The juridical strength of these species became iconic for the tension between ecology and economy (*Beunen et al., 2013*). Finally, also a tension between the conservation/development discourse and an animal welfare discourse emerged, related to the management of re-introduced large herbivores in nature areas that were designated as ‘wilderness areas’ (*Swart and Keulartz, 2011*). In all, this resulted in increased discussions among larger audiences on the dominant conservation/development discourse, probably leading to more support for critical discourses.

The rising credibility, stronger storylines and increased resonance among larger audiences strengthened critical discourses. However, recent developments in the Netherlands especially confirm the important role of the fourth theoretical factor, the role of authoritative actors as ‘discursive agencies’. Before 2010, hardly any authoritative author openly aligned with the critical discourses. A backbencher from the populist party would sometimes critically

reflect on the dominant discourse, but both he and his party were not seen as very authoritative on nature conservation issues by the mainstream media. At least not until they aligned with the new government in 2010. The formation of this government resulted in drastic change. First of all, because the new State Secretary himself had a huge impact on the debate. After a decade of being rather marginal, the critical discourses suddenly were voiced by the most influential politician in the field who also actively used these discourses to criticize dominant institutions. As such, Bleker could never have changed nature policy so drastically if he could not have based his critique and call for change on already existing critical discourses. Indeed, he aligned his arguments very well with both the *lock on development* discourse and the *local ownership* discourse (and to a lesser extent with the *populist* discourse). This contributed to a breakdown of the social contract around nature conservation. Interestingly, dominant media also increasingly opened up for the critical discourses and critically discussed the impact of nature policy for economy and local actors. Even the progressive-Christian newspaper *Trouw*, previously a strong supporter of nature conservation, suggested in their editorial that the dominant nature policy should be reconsidered (Trouw, 2011). One authority opening up political space for the critical discourses thus mobilized other authoritative actors, including the media.

In parallel, the authority, and thus legitimacy, of the most important actors in the conservation/development discourse coalition eroded. From the 1990s onwards, the authority of ecological professionals in the field was primarily based on ecological knowledge expertise. Policy decisions were often legitimated by references to such expertise and debates were frequently closed down based on ecological knowledge arguments (Buizer and Turnhout, 2011). However, as the authority of scientific knowledge has diminished in the last decades, both within (van Bommel, 2008) and outside (Jasanoff, 2004) nature policy, the legitimacy of arguments based on such knowledge also decreased. Previously dominant actors thus lost much of their credibility, and their imago of professionalism and independence turned into an image of self-referential – or even arrogant – proponents of ecocentric, anti-human protectionism (Buijs et al., 2011).

## Conclusions

### *Discursive institutionalism*

In this paper we have used a discursive institutionalist approach to understand both stability and change in Dutch nature conservation policy over the last 30 years. Discursive institutionalism explicitly focuses on abrupt institutional changes and the role which new or emerging counter ideas play. This is exactly what we have witnessed in Dutch policy since 2010. The analytical dualism between institutions and discourses on which the approach is based – and the idea of a longitudinal discursive-institutional spiral – enabled us not only to study institutional forces and path dependencies in policy over time, but processes of the production, reproduction and transformation of (counter)discourses, as well as their interactions.

Our discursive institutionalist approach expands the focus on path dependency, dominant in many classical institutionalist approaches, to include path-formation or path shaping (Hay, 2006) through discursive struggles and re-institutionalization processes. Indeed, continuity through path dependency was visible in the Netherlands during many years. Routine behaviour of ecologists and politicians successfully reproduced the institutional setup of nature policy for a long time. Although critical actors challenged the dominant discourse and practices, for a long time they were not able to seriously challenge the dominant discourse.

However, the institutionalization in the 1990s that initially seemed to stabilize policies also engendered critical discourses. Within these critical discourses, the topic of nature conservation was reformulated (or *reframed*; Raitio, 2013) from a predominantly ecological challenge to also an economic and societal challenge. Institutional practices were eventually weakened and partly broken down based on the strategic use of these critical discourses by authoritative actors. Reproduction of institutionalized patterns is thus as important as the agency of actors who choose not to conform to dominant patterns of thinking and behaving. Adding a discursive element to institutionalist approaches thus provided for analytical tools to understand change, not only from external forces, such as the economy or elections, but also from within policy practices.

In addition, enriching discourse theory with insights from neo-institutionalism helps to evaluate which ideas and discourses are indeed materialized in policy and social practices, which discourses are not, and why. The counter-discourses of the late 1990s, although discursively very relevant by themselves, remained ‘institutionally dormant’ for years, but could – through discursive agencies (Bleker) and changing contexts (political populism and economic crisis) – be ‘woken up’ and turned into (emerging) new institutional arrangements.

This turns our focus to the role of agency. Discursive institutionalism acknowledges the role of agency in challenging institutional arrangements (Raitio, 2013). It was indeed the agency of several actors that played an important role in the developments of discourses and institutions in the Netherlands. Not only State Secretary Bleker is an important example of this, but also many actors on the local level. Either through protesting against institutionalized practices or by developing alternative arrangements, they deliberately searched for discursive and institutional spaces to practice nature conservation in a local context, and in a different way. Hence, dominant practices and discourses were challenged and alternatives formulated. Although most of these initiatives certainly did not focus on wider institutional changes, they nevertheless strengthened the persuasive power of the critical *local ownership* discourse, challenged the dominant discourse on nature conservation and eventually incorporated alternatives in policy discussions. Indeed, as Phillips et al. (2004) have suggested, if individual actions are enduring and appealing, they may influence existing discourses or even engender innovative discourses that eventually enable or constrain actions and thus either challenge existing institutions or engender alternative ones.

### *Future developments*

After an internal crisis, the administration of Rutte 1, installed in 2010, broke down in April 2012. After elections, a new administration was installed in November 2012. The liberal-conservatives (VVD) were again represented, now together with the social democratic party (PvdA). The new State-Secretary for nature conservation, Sharon Dijksma, is a member of the Social Democratic party which has been a strong supporter of the conservation/development discourse for a long time. As such, political circumstances have changed once again. However, it is clear that the dominance of the conservation/development discourse is not to return any day soon, nor are the institutions in which it materialized. The recent policy note by the new State Secretary also explicitly speaks of a shift in Dutch nature conservation policy (Dijksma, 2013). Although the rhetoric is different, many elements are in line with the shifts initiated by the first Rutte administration. New policy explicitly includes elements from the *local ownership* discourse and the *lock on development* discourse: the National Ecological Network needs to align with local needs and with the Green Economy, and negative effects of nature conservation on economic



development need to be limited. The sudden turn in Dutch nature policy is thus clearly not just related to a change in government, but also related to much larger changes in the economic, political and societal contexts.

What will the future bring? Discursive space has certainly been opened up in recent times. Previously subordinate critical discourses are now openly discussed and have a strong impact on nature policy and practices. Meanwhile, the need for regional integration of ecological objectives is acknowledged by the new government, although much less strict and self-referential than before 2010. As such, nature policy in the Netherlands is still in a phase of change.

However, we do see signs of a new ‘social contract’ on how nature policy should be practiced. The recent letter by the new State secretary already suggest elements from the previously critical discourses on *local empowerment* and *lock on development* to be included in new laws, thus becoming institutionalized in Dutch nature policy and practices. Indeed, discussion now focuses very much on the quest for the economic potentialities of nature, based on the ecosystem services it provides (De Groot, 2002). Based on current discourses and policies, the ‘economy of ecology’ will certainly play a much more important role in the near future. New economic partners are actively explored, related to health, food production and consumption, water management, housing etc.

Secondly, the de-institutionalization of the previous conservation/development discourse also opened up discursive space for the emergence of a *Do-it-Yourself* discourse (De Lijster, 2012), which is partly based on the “local ownership” discourse. In line with a more general “Big Society” discourse related to localism and devolution (Blond, 2010), much more attention is now paid to local practices of grassroots initiatives on greening local environments. Indeed, as in several other European states (Lachmund, 2013), the devolution and localization of nature conservation is a fast developing practice in the Netherlands. Numerous grassroots initiatives have emerged, ranging from urban agriculture to guerrilla gardening initiatives to businesses adopting botanic gardens. Probably even more important, these initiatives are seen by many as inspirations for future nature conservation practices. Although not yet institutionalized into nature policy, the discourse of Do-It-Yourself nature is already influential on all spatial scales of policy making and seems to provide important elements for the a new social contract on nature conservation in the Netherlands.

Such a new social contract will have to develop in a significantly changed institutional environment. First of all, the National Government will play a much more limited role. Although provinces will for a large part replace the role of the national government, on the whole, the government’s input in nature conservation will decrease. This certainly holds for the budgets, which will most likely remain more limited than the last 20 years. In addition, the strongly institutionalized collaboration between NGOs and the government, both in policymaking and finance, will be diminishing too. Several NGOs are deliberately loosening their institutional ties with state agencies and increasing their collaboration with local non-state actors. Overall, diversity in discourses as well as in institutional arrangements seems to characterize current nature conservation in the Netherlands. Although some members of the formerly dominant discourse coalition see this as a threat, it may also open up opportunities for previously critical actors, such as farmers and tourism businesses, to engage with nature conservation. Furthermore, such diversity may help to prevent the over-institutionalization of policy and the polarization of actors as has occurred before. As such, diversity in institutions, discourses and practices may contribute to the social and political resilience of nature policy in the Netherlands.

## References

- Archer, M.S., 1996. Social integration and system integration: developing the distinction. *Sociology* 30, 679–699.
- Arnouts, R., 2010. Regional Nature Governance in the Netherlands: Four Decades of Governance Modes and Shifts in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Midden-Brabant. Forest and Nature Conservation. Wageningen University and Research Centre, Wageningen, pp. 360.
- Arnouts, R., van der Zouwen, M., Arts, B., 2012. Analysing governance modes and shifts – governance arrangements in Dutch nature policy. *Forest Policy and Economics* 16, 43–50.
- Arts, B., Buizer, M., 2009. Forests, discourses, institutions. A discursive-institutional analysis of global forest governance. *Forest Policy and Economics* 11, 340–347.
- Beunen, R., Hagens, J.E., 2009. The use of the concept of Ecological Networks in nature conservation policies and planning practices. *Landscape Research* 34, 563–580.
- Beunen, R., Van Assche, K., Duineveld, M., 2013. Performing failure in conservation policy: the implementation of European Union directives in the Netherlands. *Land Use Policy* 31, 280–288.
- Blond, P., 2010. *Red Tory: How Left and Right have Broken Britain and How we can Fix It*. Faber and Faber, London.
- Blyth, M., 2002. Institutions and ideas. In: Marsh, D., Stoker, G. (Eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Buijs, A., Lawrence, A., 2013. Emotional conflicts in rational forestry: towards a research agenda for understanding emotions in environmental conflicts. *Forest Policy and Economics* 33, 104–111.
- Buijs, A., Mattijssen, T., Kamphorst, D., 2013. Struggle over a new narrative on nature conservation policy: the role of framing. *Landschap* 30, 33–41.
- Buijs, A.E., Arts, B.J.M., Elands, B.H.M., Lengkeek, J., 2011. Beyond environmental frames: the social representation and cultural resonance of nature in conflicts over a Dutch woodland. *Geoforum* 42, 329–342.
- Buijs, A.E., Fischer, A., Rink, D., Young, J.C., 2008. Looking beyond superficial knowledge gaps: understanding public representations of biodiversity. *International Journal of Biodiversity Science and Management* 4, 65–80.
- Buijs, A.E., Langers, F., Mattijssen, T., Salverda, I.E., 2012. Draagvlak in de energieke samenleving: van acceptatie naar betrokkenheid en legitimatie. Alterra Wageningen UR, Wageningen, pp. 84.
- Buizer, M., 2008. Worlds Apart. Interactions Between Local Initiatives and Established Policy. Forest and Nature Conservation. Wageningen UR, Wageningen, pp. 242.
- Buizer, M., Turnhout, E., 2011. Text, talk, things, and the subpolitics of performing place. *Geoforum* 42, 530–538.
- Cairns, J., Heckman, J.R., 1996. Restoration ecology: the state of an emerging field. *Annual Review of Energy and the Environment* 21, 167–189.
- Cleaver, F., 2002. Reinventing institutions: bricolage and the social embeddedness of natural resource management. *European Journal of Development Research* 14, 11–30.
- de Bakker, H.C.M., Koppen, C.S.A.v., Vader, J., 2007. Het groene hart van burgers: het maatschappelijk draagvlak voor natuur en natuurbeleid. Wettelijke Onderzoekstaken Natuur & Milieu, Wageningen.
- De Groot, R.S., 2002. A typology for the classification, description and valuation of ecosystem functions, goods and services. *Ecological Economics* 41, 393–408.
- de Jong, D., 1999. Tussen natuurontwikkeling en Landschaftsschutz: sociaal-cognitieve configuraties in het grensoverschrijdende natuurbeleid. Eburon, Delft.
- De Lijster, E., 2011. Strijd om natuurbeleid: op zoek naar nieuwe verhalen, symbolen en coalities. *Landschap* 28, 173–180.
- De Lijster, E.B., 2012. Nature Policy in a Discursive Struggle: In Search of New Symbols, Stories and Coalitions. Understanding the recent Political Changes and its Implications for Conservation Practices. Forest and Nature Conservation. Wageningen University, Wageningen, pp. 115.
- Dekker, J., 2011. Nature conservation in turbulent times. *Landschap* 2011, 43–49.
- Den Besten, J., Arts, B., Verkooien, P., 2014. The evolution of REDD+: an analysis of discursive-institutional dynamics. *Environmental Science & Policy* (in press).
- Derksen, P., 2008. The Politics of Rural Governance. Case Studies of Rural Partnerships in the Netherlands and Wales, Rural Sociology Group. Wageningen University, Wageningen.
- Dijkema, S., 2013. Letter to Parliament on nature conservation summit, Nature Day and nature vision (Brief aan Tweede Kamer over Natuurtop, 24 h van de Natuur en Natuurvisie), Den Haag.
- Ferranti, F., Beunen, R., Speranza, M., 2010. Natura 2000 network: a comparison of the Italian and Dutch implementation experiences. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 12, 293–314.
- Foucault, M., 1994. *Power*. The New Press, New York.
- Giddens, A., 1981. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*. Macmillan, London.
- Giddens, A., 1984. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Habermas, J., 1996. *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Hajer, M.A., 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hay, C., 2006. *Constructivist Institutionalism: Or Why Ideas into Interests Don't Go*. University of Birmingham.
- Horlings, I., Gersie, J., 1995. Agriculture and nature in ecological networks in the Netherlands and Europe. *European Environment* 5, 7–12.

- Horst, K.v.d., 2011. Bleker wil van elitenatuur naar boerenatuur. Boerderij, Boerderij.nl.
- Howarth, D., 2000. Discourse. Open University Press, Buckingham, UK.
- Jacobs, M.H., Buijs, A.E., 2011. Understanding stakeholders' attitudes toward water management interventions: role of place meanings. *Water Resources Research* 47, 1–11.
- Jasanoff, S., 2004. *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and the Social Order*. Routledge, London.
- Keulartz, J., 2009. European nature conservation and restoration policy – problems and perspectives. *Restoration Ecology* 17, 446–450.
- Keulartz, J., Korthals, M., 1997. *Museum aarde: natuur, criterium of constructie?* Boom, Amsterdam.
- Kloek, M.E., Buijs, A.E., Boersema, J.J., Schouten, M.G.C., 2013. Crossing borders: review of concepts and approaches in research on greenspace, immigration and society in Northwest European countries. *Landscape Research* 38, 117–140.
- Lachmund, J., 2013. *Greening Berlin: The Co-Production of Science, Politics, and Urban Nature*. MIT Press, Cambridge.
- LNV L M.v., 1990. *Natuurbeleidsplan; Regeringsbeslissing*. SDU, Den Haag.
- Marijnissen, H., 2012. Bij kleiner Staatsbosbeheer moet natuur zichzelf redden. Trouw.
- Mattijssen, T.J.M., Behagel, J.H., Buijs, A.E., 2013. Do democratic innovations realize democratic goods? Two case studies of area committees in the Netherlands. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* (submitted for publication).
- Natuurmonumenten, 2013. *Nieuwe energie. Jaarverslag 2012 (New Energy. Annual Report)*.
- Nooteboom, S., 2006. *Adaptive Networks. The Governance for Sustainable Development*. Eburon, Delft.
- North, D., 1991. Institutions. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, 97–112.
- Peters, G., Piore, J., King, D., 2005. The politics of path dependency: political conflict in historical institutionalism. *Journal of Politics* 67, 1275–1300.
- Philips, N., Lawrence, T., Hardy, C., 2004. Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review* 29, 635–652.
- Radio-1, 2011. Interview With Henk Bleker.
- Raitio, K., 2013. Discursive institutionalist approach to conflict management analysis – the case of old-growth forest conflicts on state-owned land in Finland. *Forest Policy and Economics* 33, 97–103.
- Rientjes, S., 2002. Making nature conservation modern: an analysis of developments in nature conservation policy in relation to macro-social changes – the Netherlands as a case study. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 4, 1–21.
- RLI, 2013. In: *infrastructuur, R.v.d.l.e. (Ed.), Onbepikt houdbaar. Naar een robuust natuurbeleid*.
- Schmidt, V., 2005. Institutionalism and the state. In: Hay, C., Marsh, D., Lister, M. (Eds.), *The State: Theories and Issues*. Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Schmidt, V., 2008. Discursive institutionalism: the explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, 303–326.
- Schmidt, V., 2011. Speaking of change: why discourse is key to the dynamics of policy transformation. *Critical Policy Studies* 5, 106–126.
- Stoll-Kleemann, S., 2001. Reconciling opposition to protected areas management in Europe: the German experience. *Environment* 43, 32–44.
- Swart, J.A.A., Keulartz, J., 2011. Wild animals in our backyard. A contextual approach to the intrinsic value of animals. *Acta Biotheoretica* 59, 185–200.
- Trecek, W., Thelen, K., 2005. *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Trouw, 2011. Nuchterheid over natuur is welkom. Trouw.
- Turnhout, E., Van Bommel, S., Aarts, N., 2010. How participation creates citizens: participatory governance as performative practice. *Ecology and Society*, 15.
- Turnhout, E., van der Zouwen, M., 2010. 'Governance without governance': how nature policy was democratized in the Netherlands. *Critical Policy Studies* 4, 344–361.
- van Bommel, S., 2008. Understanding Experts and Expertise in Different Governance Contexts: The Case of Nature Conservation in the Drentsche Aa Area in the Netherlands. [S.l.: s.n.].
- Van den Top, M., Van der Zouwen, M., 2002. Europees natuurbeleid in Nederland: een pionier die zichzelf in de weg loopt. *Landschap* 17, 81–96.
- Van der Heijden, H.A., 2005. Ecological restoration, environmentalism and the Dutch politics of 'new nature'. *Environmental Values* 14, 427–446.
- Van der Windt, H.J., 1995. En dan: wat is natuur nog in dit land? *Natuurbescherming in Nederland 1880–1990*. Boom, Amsterdam.
- Van Der Windt, H.J., 2012. Biologists bridging science and the conservation movement: the rise of nature conservation and nature management in the Netherlands, 1850–1950. *Environment and History* 18, 209–236.
- van der Windt, H.J., Swart, J.A.A., Keulartz, J., 2007. Nature and landscape planning: exploring the dynamics of valuation, the case of the Netherlands. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 79, 218–228.
- van Lieshout, M., 2011. Bleker houdt ondanks verzet provincies vast aan natuurakkoord, *De Volkskrant. De Persgroep Nederland*. <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/article/detail/3095300/2011/12/27/Bleker-houdt-ondanks-verzet-provincies-vast-aan-natuurakkoord.dhtml>
- Vossen, P., 2010. Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders compared. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, 22–38.
- Wiering, M.A., Arts, B.J.M., 2006. Discursive shifts in Dutch river management: 'Deep' institutional change or adaptation strategy? *Hydrobiologia* 565, 327–338.
- Wiering, M.A., Driessen, P.P.J., 2001. Beyond the art of diking: interactive policy on river management in The Netherlands. *Water Policy* 3, 283–296.
- Wit, B.D., Wieringa, K., Hajer, M., 2011. Nature outlook and changing socio-political context. *Landschap* 28, 163–170.
- Zaken, M.v.E., 2011a. In: Zaken, M.v.E. (Ed.), *Regels over de bescherming van de natuur - memorie van toelichting*. , p. 264 <http://www.internetconsultatie.nl/wetnatuur/document/438>
- Zaken, M.v.E., 2011b. In: Zaken, M.v.E. (Ed.), *Wetsvoorstel Natuur*. , p. 69 <http://www.internetconsultatie.nl/wetnatuur/document/437>