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Policy discourses for reconnecting nature with society: The search for societal engagement in Dutch nature conservation policies.

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ABSTRACT

The recently published EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 emphasizes nature's benefits to humans. In line with wider shifts in nature conservation discourses in many European countries, moving from nature's intrinsic value towards its instrumental values, the EU strategy strongly focuses on a 'Natural capital' view. In this context of a European wide search for business opportunities and societal engagement in nature conservation, this article investigates efforts from Dutch governments to strengthen the link between nature conservation and society. Over the past 10 years, policy responsibilities for nature conservation in the Netherlands have been decentralized from the national level to the twelve provinces, who have employed a variety of approaches to stimulate societal engagement in nature conservation.

Through discourse analysis, we show how the previously hegemonic "Ecology First" discourse – a hierarchical mode of governance with a strong focus on intrinsic values – has transgressed towards a more flexible and adaptive "Partnership for Nature" discourse, with a strong focus on aligning with local stakeholders through network governance. In addition, we describe the emergence of three new discourses: a "Green Economy" discourse, capitalizing on ecosystem services to unleash new financial resources; a "Relational Nature" discourse with a strong focus on people's connections to nature; and a "Democratic Nature" discourse focusing on nature's intrinsic and relational values combined with a mosaic governance approach. While the EU Biodiversity Strategy focus on natural capital aligns very well with the Dutch Green Economy discourse, the EU strategy gives little attention to the relational and democratic dimensions of societal engagement.

Based on our analysis, we show that changing modes of governance relate to changes in values of nature. Government's need for new conservation partners requires opening up for new values of nature. In addition, changing values of nature require a change in governance structures to allow new actors to participate and contribute. The increasing focus on natural capital and green economy at the European level may be a first step in such diversification. However, we argue that Europe needs to develop additional strategies beyond instrumental values, to allow for further diversification of values and include all stakeholders from society.

1. Introduction

In May 2020, the European Commission launched its new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - *Bringing nature back into our lives* - with ambitious plans to restore Europe's biodiversity and enhance the benefits of nature for people (EC, 2020). Although the notion that nature provides benefits for businesses and contributes to human wellbeing is not a new concept, the launching of the new Biodiversity Strategy indicates that this view on Europe's nature has (re)taken center stage. This 'Natural capital' view on nature is in stark contrast with the view on the intrinsic value of nature as laid down in the European Habitats Directive formulated in the early nineties. Reactions to the Biodiversity Strategy so far (Hermoso et al., 2022; Mitchell Lennan and Giulia Sajeva, 2020; Rinaldi, 2021) mostly focus whether the Strategy indeed will contribute

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to protecting biodiversity and will ensure adequate stakeholder involvement given the earlier experiences on protected area management or whether the strategy will enable to ensure enough funding or societal support based on the values for society.

Over time, both European and Dutch nature policies have reflected different discourses how natural landscapes should be protected, including visions on stakeholder inclusion, economic incentives and benefits and intrinsic values. In various European countries, focus has shifted from hierarchical approaches from central states towards including the views of diverse societal actors (Bouwma, 2018; Mattijssen et al., 2018a, 2018b). While national and international institutions still play a key role in designing conservation policy, such as the Natura 2000 network and the development of interconnected green infrastructure, the implementation of these policies has increasingly become a process in which a variety of societal actors and lower-level authorities play an important role, including NGO's, business actors, (groups of) citizens and governments on various levels of scale (Pauleit et al., 2019; Mace, 2014). These changes have be summarized as changing discourses from what has been labeled a "Ecology First" discourse towards a "People Inclusive" discourse (Stoll-Kleemann, 2001).

More and more, it is emphasized that authorities need to engage with a variety of stakeholders to effectively conserve nature with public support for policy implementation. This means that restrictive protection of nature is not enough. An example of this is the recent IPBES-report, which emphasizes that although legal nature protection is important, it is not enough to save the worlds biodiversity: nature should also be incorporated in economic sectors and in the behavior of people (Díaz et al., 2019). More generally, the increasing scientific attention for societal engagement in nature conservation can be seen in the increasing popularity of terminology such as active citizenship (Buijs et al., 2019); co-production (Frantzeskaki and Kabisch, 2016); participation (Fors et al., 2015); indigenous knowledge (Nagendra and Ostrom, 2012); citizen science (Dillon et al., 2016); and bottom-up approaches (Enqvist et al., 2019).

Increasing engagement of societal stakeholders is closely related to a shifting role and involvement of various levels of governments. While central authorities retain an important role in how nature conservation is taking shape, regional and local authorities have gained a more prominent role in how policies are developed and especially in their implementation (Bouwma, 2018; Mattijssen et al., 2018a, 2018b), as emphasized in terminology such as decentralization (Hovik and Hongslo, 2017), devolution (Pecurul-Botines et al., 2019) and localization or localizing (Blondet et al., 2017). In other words, centralized top-down steering in the field of nature conservation policy is increasingly supplemented with more regional, networked and participatory forms of governance. Meanwhile, success or failure of such networked and participatory forms of governance is debated, and contingent on actual nature conservation practices on the ground (Beunen et al., 2013; Turnhout et al., 2015).

1.1. Nature conservation policy in the Netherlands

Similar trends towards increased societal engagement can be witnessed in the Netherlands. From the 1990′s, the Netherlands has played an important role in developing the concept of green infrastructure, including current Natura 2000 policies. From the 1990′s, Dutch nature conservation strongly focused on protecting designated areas through spatial planning and developing a green infrastructure of interconnected ecological areas and corridors. It was characterized by a technocratic approach based on an "Ecology First" discourse with a strong focus on biodiversity and other intrinsic values of nature (Arnouts et al., 2012; Stoll-Kleemann, 2001; Arts et al., 2018). In this context, several stakeholders experienced the designation of areas for the European Natura 2000 areas of protected areas as a very hierarchical process with little room for stakeholder engagements (Beunen et al., 2013), especially not from citizens (Mattijssen et al., 2015). However, after formal designation as Natura 2000 area of conservation, at the regional level a much more consensual and pragmatic approach was taken in the implementation phase, in which the interests of societal stakeholders were taken into account in deliberative planning processes regarding individual Natura 2000 areas (Beunen et al., 2009). However, this input was usually restricted to powerful and organized actors, including farmers associations, tourism organizations and nature conservationist associations and again individual citizens and their organization were usually not included in the process (Buijs et al., 2014).

While Dutch nature conservation had long been centrally organized, a new national government drastically changed the playing field in 2011. This government initiated large budget cuts on nature conservation and a partial halt of developments of the Dutch National Nature Network aimed at protecting and connecting Natura 2000 areas (Buijs et al., 2014). In 2013, most responsibilities for nature conservation was formally decentralized towards the twelve Dutch provinces, accompanied by a call for increased societal engagement (Folkert and Boonstra, 2017). The national government only retained an overall co-ordinating role and the formal responsibility implementation for the EU Habitats Directive. The provinces organize and implement nature conservation ambitions, including the management of many of the Natura 2000 sites. One of the consequences of the decentralization is that the diversity between provinces, i.e. on policy ambitions, organization and finances, increases (Kuindersma et al., 2015). Although all provinces formally aim to strengthening relationships with societal and economic actors, different discourses and strategies are employed. Some provinces more than others seek to establish partnerships with economic sectors or invite individuals, companies, local authorities and civil society organizations to contribute (financially) to their nature conservation policies (Kamphorst and Coninx, 2016; Kuindersma et al., 2015). This diversity between twelve provinces provides insight in the variety of discourses aiming to combine the protection of biodiversity with increased societal engagement.

1.2. Research objectives

The aim of our paper is to critically scrutinize the different discourses on societal engagement in nature conservation practices. With reference to the recent changes in European biodiversity policies, and the growing discursive focus on societal engagement and the economic value and benefits of nature and biodiversity, we use the analysis of similar developments in Dutch nature conservation discourses over the last ten years as inspiration to reflect on the recent shifts materialized in the European Biodiversity Strategy (EC, 2020). With the Netherlands being an early adopter of a focus on societal engagement, recent experiences in this country may internationally provide interesting insights regarding efforts to shift nature conservation policy towards more inclusive approaches.

Empirically, our paper focuses on the diversity of discourses developed in regional nature conservation policies in the Netherlands, with an explicit focus on the ambitions to increase societal engagement from different stakeholders, ranging from farmers to businesses, NGOs and local citizens. These discourses developed within a general shift towards more multi-level and multi-actor forms of nature conservation governance, a shift that resonates with developments in many other European countries (Pecurul-Botines et al., 2019; Baglioni, 2015; Bouwma, 2018).

In this paper, we specifically focus on the *discourse* embedded in these policies. These discourses include diverging views on (i) the governance of nature, (ii) the values of nature and (iii) the relationship between the two. Next to the scientific relevance of investigating these relationships, it also provides relevant information for policy makers across Europe on how decentralization, changes in modes of governance and stakeholder engagement are related to the values that conservation policies seek to protect.

We continue this article with a discussion of relevant theory in Section 2, before introducing the research approach and employed

methods for data collection and analysis in Section 3. Section 4 presents our analysis, introducing and describing four main discourses which we have identified: Relational Nature, Partnerships for Nature, Green Economy and Democratic Nature. We conclude this article with a discussion of the results and their relevance.

2. Theory

As described above, discourses on societal engagement in nature conservation reflect different perspectives on governance and how to include societal actors in developing and implementing nature conservation policies. Besides this, they also reflect different views on how nature is valued. Below, we will elaborate on scientific theory concerning the different values of nature as well as on different strands of governance theory. We will not build a strict, integrative analytical framework on basis of these theories. Rather, we employ insights offered by these theories in order to assess how different elements from these bodies of literature are reflected in various policy discourses.

2.1. Values of nature

Traditionally, social science literature on the values of nature distinguishes between instrumental and intrinsic values (Chan et al., 2016). The *intrinsic value* of nature refers to the notion that nature has a value of its own, regardless of its usability for humans (Muhar et al., 2018). Based on this perspective, it is emphasized that humanity has a moral obligation to protect plants, animals, species and habitats in order to protect nature (Buijs, 2009). Conservation biology, as well as many ecologists and nature conservation NGOs, are deeply influenced by this moral obligation to protect nature (Piccolo, 2017).

In contrast, the idea of *instrumental values* focuses on the functions and services which nature provides to humans. Examples of such functions and services are nature's contribution to timber production or water retention, but also to human health and wellbeing. Especially the ecosystem services approaches is founded on such instrumental values (De Groot, 2002). Within nature conservation, both intrinsic and instrumental values are mobilized to convince stakeholders of the need for conservation. Intrinsic values are mobilized for a moral appeal on our responsibility for nature, while mobilization of instrumental values refers to the for example importance of pollinators for agriculture, forests for climate change mitigation or urban parks for public health and well-being (Runhaar et al., 2019; Canadell and Raupach, 2008; Hartig et al., 2014).

Recently, relational values have gained traction as a third type of values of nature (Chan et al., 2016). *Relational values* are defined as "preferences, principles, and virtues associated with relationships, both interpersonal and as articulated by policies and social norms" (Chan et al., 2016). Relational values are based on the reciprocal relationships that people build with nature and natural areas, recognizing that humans and nature are fundamentally interconnected. The concept focuses on the inherent qualities of these relationships, rather than only on the worth of nature for either itself (intrinsic value) or for humankind (instrumental value) (Mattijssen et al. 2020). The value of deeply felt attachments and relations with natural as well as cultural landscapes is well recognized in landscape approaches (Arts et al., 2017) and in the European Landscape Convention (Antrop, 2005), as well as in other established theoretical concepts such as sense of place (Manzo, 2003), connectedness to nature (Mayer and McPherson Frantz, 2004) and stewardship practices (Nassauer, 2011).

2.2. Governance theory

Societal engagement in nature conservation is strongly related to how the governance of natural areas is organized in a country and its regions. Governance encompasses '*the many ways in which public and private actors from the state, market and/or civil society govern public issues at multiple scales, autonomously or in mutual interaction*' (Arts and Visseren-Hamakers, 2012). Generally speaking, governance is about (processes of) steering including issues of power, the involvement of different stakeholders and how different levels of scale from local to global relate to each other (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Based on such characteristics, governance theory distinguishes between different styles or modes of governance (Driessen et al., 2012). Although there are differences between authors, most conceptualizations distinguish a range of governance approaches between a top-down development of policies with a strong central role for the government on the one end and bottom-up policy development with decentralized power structures and shared responsibilities on the other (Driessen et al., 2012; Arnouts et al., 2012).

In this paper, we use a typology of four different governance modes based on the above. In the *hierarchical governance* mode, dominant in many countries until the 2000′s, democratically legitimized governments take the lead in both goal setting and implementation of nature conservation policies (Arnouts et al., 2012). Public engagement in this mode of governance usually focuses on strictly defined public participation processes in the implementation of policies (Rauschmayer et al., 2009). This mode of governance is often associated with nature conservation legislation which defines conservation areas, species that require protection and permitting procedures for activities that might endanger these values.

The second mode of governance is called *network governance* (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009), also referred to as interactive governance (Driessen et al., 2012) or co-governance (Arnouts et al., 2012). This mode of governance has increased its popularity over the last decades as many governments increasingly started collaborating with other stakeholders, such as businesses, municipalities and other stakeholders. While goalsetting often remained located at the National or European level, implementation was negotiated within networks of stakeholders. The openness of these networks ranges between open- and closed co-governance approaches (Arnouts et al., 2012). In closed governance approaches, networks tend to consist of a limited range of actors that are considered crucial for the successful implementation of policies. Local communities tend not to be included in such networks (Mattijssen et al., 2015). Often associated with network governance are agreement-based instruments such as covenants between different parties as well as joint actions proposed for nature.

The third governance mode is *market governance*, also known as new public management (NPM) or public-private partnerships (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Arnouts et al., 2012; Driessen et al., 2012; Skelcher, 2005). Market governance focusses on the introduction of management concepts from private companies into public policy. It focusses on efficiency and customer orientation and a diminished role for government i.e. by out-sourcing public tasks to private actors or public-private cooperation. This generally implies a strong separation between policy making (by government) and policy implementation (by private parties of public-private partnerships) (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Kuindersma and Boonstra, 2010). These managerial ideas have also been introduced in Dutch nature policies in recent years. Market governance can also include market based instruments, such as fines and (tax) incentives or efforts to create markets to capitalize on ecosystem services delivered by natural areas.

The last type of governance is *mosaic governance,* also described self-governance, and closely related to social innovation (Driessen et al., 2012; Buijs et al., 2016; Moulaert et al., 2014). In this mode of governance, active citizens, social enterprises, community groups, and local NGOs initiate numerous local and small scale initiatives to deliver public goods, including urban green, cultural and natural landscapes (van Dam, 2016; Wagenaar et al., 2015). Mosaic governance focusses on the exchange of resources, discourses, and experiences between governments and such active citizens (Buijs et al., 2016; Gopalakrishnan and Chong, 2020). Typical for this form of governance is the formulation of goals and methods on the community level, but embedded within an

institutional context of governmental regulations (Buijs et al., 2019). Despite the relative autonomy of active citizens in decision making, local and regional governments often play an important role in facilitating, stimulating and regulating (Mattijssen et al., 2018a, 2018b; de Wilde, Hurenkamp, and Tonkens, 2014). For this, governments use a wide and flexible range of communicative and financial instruments, such as subsidies, legal flexibility, and knowledge exchange platforms to stimulate or regulate such initiatives (Krasny and Tidball, 2012; Buijs et al., 2019).

3. Methods

This article is based on a discourse analysis of several empirical studies conducted by the authors on Dutch nature conservation policies between 2011 and 2019. These studies include multiple case studies on the provincial and regional level. Most of these studies have been performed for the evaluation of the formal decentralization agreement of 2013, when nature conservation policy was decentralized from the Dutch national government to the provinces [References to authors removed]. Aggregated, our analysis builds on approximately 75 individual and group interviews, 13 in depth case studies and the analysis of relevant policy documents in all 12 provinces. Most of the interviews were conducted with provincial employees, partly focussing on mapping provincial policy strategies for the realization of the Nature Network and for societalization of nature policies in general, and partly focussing on specific strategies and case studies for societal involvement in nature policy, such as participatory processes for realization of nature areas. For the cases studies, besides provincial employees, also many other stakeholders have been interviewed, such as farmers organizations, waterboards, municipalities, a diverse group of nature organizations and other involved organizations. Policy documents were analysed, such as nature policy plans, area-based plans, provincial decisions and regulations, subsidy guidelines, project plans, and relevant policy evaluations. The results of these analysis were discussed in several workshops with involved stakeholders at the provincial and national levels. In addition, two other empirical studies on societal engagement and decentralization of nature policy in the Netherlands conducted between 2015 and 2020, have been used [References to authors removed]. The discourses which we present have been distilled through a thorough analysis of the data from abovementioned studies. As researchers, we have had a central role in summarizing and interpreting the research data which was collected for the purpose of this article. With this, our work has an interpretive basis (Yanow, 2000).

A discourse can be described as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities' (Hajer, 1995). A discourse is a shared, coherent cluster of views which provides meaning to how certain people think, talk and act. Within such a cluster of views, diverse arguments are often connected. For example, the "big society" discourse in the UK linked ideas about community-self-organization with views on stakeholder's responsibilities in the public domain, an envisioned smaller role of the state in delivering public goods, aims for localization of planning processes, and many more related visions (Buser, 2013).

Discourses can (co-)exist on different levels. General ideas about the organization of society, specific ideas about concrete policy problems, or verbal representations of e.g. fashion trends or lifestyle choices can all be seen as a form of discourse (Liefferink, 2006). These elements of a discourse are often interrelated, and changes in one argument in a discourse may initiate changes in other arguments. An analysis of discourse is not an analysis of language as it is, but rather an analysis of how this language gains meaning through its daily use in practice and in interaction between people (Hajer, 1995). Also, we look at how the language manifests itself in policy practices, using as indicators for example the goals identified by the province, suggestion on which actors to involve, and what instruments should be used. Finally, we argue that discourses develop and change over time: the focus of a certain discourse might shift, new discourses may arise and old ones may lose their appeal and use over time (Wagenaar and Noam, 2003). The results of our analysis are a clear example of such shifts in discourses, as we will show in the next Section.

4. Results

Our analysis of policy discourses on societal involvement in provincial nature conservation policies results in four specific policy discourses, identified in multiple provinces. In our analysis, we do not include discourses that have only been identified in one specific province or discourses with no or only marginal focus on societal involvement such as the traditional "ecology first" discourse.

Table 1 provides an overview of these four main discourses. These discourses can manifest in slightly different ways between and within certain provinces, but the main arguments and characteristics of each discourse are distinctly recognizable. In the following section, we will elaborate on the functioning of these discourses in practice and discuss their relationship with the theoretical modes of governance and values of nature.

4.1. Partnerships for nature

The Partnerships for Nature discourse has developed from the "Ecology First" discourse that was dominant until 2011. It has a focus on a shared responsibility between governments and society for the realization of formal nature conservation policies, related to Natura 2000 sites and the Birds and Habitat Directives. While provinces are formally responsible for the realization of the National Nature Network, including all Natura 2000 sites, this responsibility increasingly is outsourced to closed partnerships of nature conservation organizations, municipalities, farmers and waterboards, nature conservation organizations or organized groups of local citizens. This discourse is present in almost all Dutch provinces.

4.1.1. Example

The province of Gelderland initiates governance networks with regional stakeholders in order to accomplish nature policy objectives, often related to Natura2000 sites (Kuindersma et al., 2020). While a long tradition of collaboration exists between the province and nature conservation agencies, water boards, and municipalities, recently also the organization of the process itself is outsourced to these stakeholders. According to Gelderland, local stakeholders consider these actors to be more legitimate than the province because they are already known in the area and collaborations in other fields often already exist. It is argued that if local actors coordinate the implementation process, public support among farmers, citizens and other stakeholders will increase, and the implementation process will be quicker and more inclusive. "*If we make societal partners responsible, there will be more societal support, which will increase our chance for success*". In Gelderland, non-state partners are in charge in 20 out of 35 areas with provincial green infrastructure ambitions.

4.1.2. Values of nature

The focus in the Partnerships for Nature discourse is on biodiversity protection, related to the intrinsic value of nature and anchored in the EU Habitats Directive and provincial nature conservation plans. It has a strong focus on endangered species and their habitats. The type of habitats which are to be protected are defined and agreed upon by ecologists of the province. Details in the process of implementation are primarily discussed with ecologically trained professionals from other stakeholders. This concerns formal goals for Natura 2000 areas, concerning maintenance or improvement of habitat types and protection of vulnerable species. These goals often require measures for expanding sensitive habitats or improving e.g., water quality. This discourse can be

Table 1
Discourses on societal engagement in Dutch nature conservation policy.[11]

	Partnerships for nature	Relational nature	Green economy	Democratic nature
Main focus	*Expanding responsibilities for nature conservation*	*Improving vitality of rural areas*	*Capitalizing on ecosystem services to unleash new financial resources*	*Empowerment of local citizens to strengthen green areas*
Goals	Biodiversity	Cultural landscapes	Ecosystem services	Biodiversity
	Habitat restoration and ecosystem management	Cultural identity	Multifunctionality	Green leisure & health
		Experiencing nature		Experiencing Nature
				Cultural landscapes
Actors (In order of relevance)	Governments	Governments	Entrepreneurs	Active citizens
	Conservation NGOs	Local NGOs	Governments	Social enterprises
	Farmers	Conservation NGOs	Farmers	Local governments
	Waterboards	Volunteers		
Goalsetting	Top-down	Shared goal setting and responsibility	Bottom-up within financial and regulatory frame	Bottom-up within regulatory frame
Instruments	Legislation	Subsidies,	Subsidies focussing on innovation	Grants
	Covenants	Network development	Agri-environmental schemes	Knowledge Exchange
			Tax-exemptions	Network facilitation
				All small scale-

considered a continuation of the traditional "Ecology First" discourse in which rewilding and nature restoration projects, core to Dutch nature conservation policies since 1980, are still propagated. In the implementation process, local stakeholders are invited to co-decide on the detailed allocation of lands.

4.1.3. Governance of nature

The realization of Natura2000 goals in the Netherlands usually takes place in regional processes through network governance, including many local stakeholders. However, in the implementation phase, the provinces increasingly develop detailed provincial plans in combination with strict performance contracts with these regional stakeholders, which could be identified as a New Public Management approach to governance. Provincial arguments for outsourcing implementation relate to efficiency (because these stakeholders have similar policy ambitions), the availability of capacity for implementation and the assumption that regional stakeholders have more local support among landowners and local inhabitants. In some cases, regional partners that meet with local protests can be forced to renegotiate with the province on the given goals and performance contracts or provinces can opt for a more hierarchical approach with the usage of legal instruments such as the expropriation of private lands.

4.2. Relational Nature

The Relational Nature discourse focuses on improving the vitality of rural areas by stimulating local actors' relational values of nature. The focus within this discourse is on open network governance, often initiated by provinces and including citizens, farmers, local NGOs and municipalities. The Relational Nature discourse can be found in 5 Dutch provinces with relatively large rural areas (5 out of 12). Before describing this discourse in more detail, we will give an example from the province of Drenthe.

4.2.1. Example

A clear example of how the Relational Nature discourse materializes in practice is 'CountrysideCare' ('Streekbeheer') in the province of Drenthe (Provincie Drenthe, 2020). The province, a regional NGO (Landschapsbeheer Drenthe) and several municipalities jointly facilitate residents and volunteer groups in managing natural and landscape values through for instance tree trimming, ditch management or the protection of meadow birds. The provincial approach to societal involvement explained by an employee: '*Our strategy is that it [societal involvement] mainly is delegated and will remain delegated to our partners: the municipalities, nature conservation associations, landscape management, Institute for Nature Education. They pull the cart and we facilitate that*". The province doubles the budget municipalities allocate for involving volunteers in the landscape. Moreover, the province facilitates intermediary organizations that involve citizens in nature conservation. A provincial employee explains the provincial perspective: '*We have no explicit vision or goals, but we have said that we want to involve people in nature. We are mainly concerned with involving people and making sure that they like it.*' The program has an explicit focus on stimulating awareness of residents of nature and activate them to take responsibility for nature in their own area.

4.2.2. Values of nature

The Relational Nature discourse emphasizes a viable countryside in which agricultural, cultural and historical landscapes are not seen as separated from nature, but as an extension of nature. The role of humans in the landscape is fully acknowledged as the discourse is closely linked to traditional practices in rural areas, in which residents take responsibility for their social and natural environment, living and acting together to ensure a viable community and living environment. Natural environments are seen as important for cultural identity, for economy and for health. The discourse is about developing green that is close to people and peoples' hearts, about maintaining and restoring nature and landscape with local meaning. Moreover, it is about nature which is attractive to experience for young and old.

4.2.3. Governance of nature

Provinces tend to react to pressing issues concerning the vitality of the countryside by developing policy and programs tapping into the social ways of living. The governance model of the Relational Nature discourse is mostly a form of open network governance, which is initiated by provinces and facilitates the involvement of local actors such as

citizens and farmers with various forms of green. This is done by offering support, providing funding and developing networks for sharing knowledge and experiences. The actual support and coordination is often delegated to intermediary organizations, nature conservation associations and municipalities who have the professional capacity to provide support. These are considered to be better equipped for facilitating local stakeholders, being both physically and mentally 'closer' to residents. Collaborations are open to a wide range of local stakeholders, including volunteers, schools, individual residents, and farmers. Generally there is a sharing of power and co-responsibility between local actors and governments. However, through designing the regulatory and financial framework, local and regional governments implicitly influence the focus of the activities.

4.3. Green economy

Key in the Green Economy discourse is nature's provision of ecosystem services. It focuses on capitalizing ecosystem services to unleash new financial resources from businesses and other resourceful stakeholders. The key issue of this discourse is: "go with the economic flow" and combine economic development with biodiversity objectives in general or the more specific green infrastructure ambitions. This discourse is clearly visible in the nature conservation policy of seven Dutch provinces.

4.3.1. Example

An example of the green economy discourse can be found in the nature conservation policy of Noord-Brabant (Kuindersma et al., 2020). This province has founded a Green Development Fund to realize its green infrastructure in cooperation with public and private stakeholders. This private organization has developed the concept of the entrepreneurial green infrastructure to realize 2.000 ha of new nature areas on (former) agricultural lands. A public funding with a maximum of 50% of the nature development costs is available for private initiatives. The idea is that this is combined with economic functions such as agriculture, recreation or energy production. In practice it has been challenging to find suitable initiatives that are able to combine nature development with a profitable business model. Recently however there have been successful examples that combine nature development with the (temporary) production of solar energy and with food forestry.

4.3.2. Values of nature

The Green Economy discourse suggests a shift in focus of nature conservation policies from intrinsic towards instrumental values of nature. Several provinces increasingly emphasize the multifunctionality of nature and the importance of nature conservation for economic growth, agriculture, water management, clean air, attractive business surroundings, leisure and international tourism. It is argued that societal and economic actors will be willing to invest financially in nature conservation when nature has something to offer and 'it sells'. In its extreme form nature is no longer considered a public good, but a private affair for which the economic laws of demand and supply apply. By its benefits, nature can provide a financial model for social actors and entrepreneurs. Mobilizing such additional resources is not only needed because of recent budgets cuts, but also to ensure the legitimacy of nature conservation policies: "Societal organizations and entrepreneurs will be aware of the benefits of nature for their core business, which will activate them to invest in nature and biodiversity" (Province Noord Brabant). Also non-financial ecosystem services, such as pest control or water retention, are seen as ways to mobilize farmers and water boards to invest in nature conservation.

4.3.3. Governance of nature

The Green Economy discourse focuses on market governance in open networks. Entrepreneurs are invited to take the lead in protecting and developing natural areas to unleash their potential for ecosystem services. Businesses and entrepreneurs are considered the primary actors, ranging from local small-scale recreational entrepreneurs or farmers to large, international corporations such as Heineken. Provinces may try to reduce legal or land use planning related restrictions to such initiatives. Other mechanisms may be in place to collect private money, such as green funds. The provincial role is reactive and supporting, in order to help societal initiatives to become (financially) self-dependent. "*In the end, we want to see a decrease in public finance for nature management, we want a transition to self-sufficient types of nature management*". And: "*We find it important that initiatives develop a business case and become self-dependent*" (official from province of Limburg). These quotes illustrate the ambition to gradually diminish the amount of public money spent on nature conservation.

4.4. Democratic nature

The Democratic Nature discourse focuses on empowerment of people and societal co-responsibility for nature. It aims to facilitate and activate citizens to self-organize and take responsibility for the environment. Power for goal setting lies with active citizens, who primarily focus on relational values, often combined with intrinsic values. The discourse can be found in many Dutch provinces and is particularly substantial in two provinces where there is also significant money allocated to support local citizens.

4.4.1. Example

An example of the Democratic Nature discourse can be seen in the program *Learning by Doing* ('Leren door Doen') of the Zuid-Holland province (Kunseler et al., 2020). Within this program, a diversity of local and regional actors is developing new models for realization and management of nature with a focus on connectedness between stakeholders. Active citizens and social enterprises willing to contribute to nature conservation had the lead in 15 such experiments, leading to a mosaic of approaches. A provincial employee emphasizes: "*it is about making use of energy in society together.*" Through developing tailormade solutions in working with these initiatives, Zuid Holland hoped to learn how to navigate within the new governance context, identifying what governmental role would match the needs of the societal partners initiating the project. Because of the diversity of experiments, experiences were shared and discussed with colleagues in a joint learning trajectory. For example, they learned that working with well-organized parties that have 'executive power' is more effective than working with individual citizens. Another employee said: *For example, [name], a citizens' initiative started to collaborate with companies, with the municipality, with citizens, and they set up a cooperative. And if you then have a cooperative, that becomes an interesting discussion partner for the province to help you realize your ambitions (Province of Zuid Holland).'*.

4.4.2. Values of nature

The Democratic Nature discourse is open to the diversity of values embraced by active citizens and social enterprises that initiate local projects. Experiences show that active citizens focus on a range of values, ranging from intrinsic values and biodiversity to the relational values facilitating direct interactions of citizens and children with the natural environment. Sometimes even instrumental values are included, for example in Food forest initiatives. Interestingly, there are quite some

[1] These discourses have been articulated in the following provinces: *Partnership for nature*: This discourse is visible in all provinces, but in Drenthe, Gelderland, Friesland, Overijssel and Groningen, this responsibility is increasingly outsourced to non-governmental stakeholders, including nature conservation organizations and municipalities; *Relational Nature*: Drenthe Gelderland, Friesland, Overijssel and Groningen; *Green Economy*: Noord-Holland, Overijssel, Limburg, Utrecht and Gelderland, Flevoland en Noord-Brabant; *Democratic nature*: Zuid-Holland, Noord-Brabant.

examples where citizens focus more strongly on the intrinsic values of nature than governments or even nature conservation organizations. For involved provinces, democratic values from participatory democracy outweigh the values of nature. This is an explicit strategy to maximize protection of local communities' values of nature, rather than those set by provinces. Within this context, provinces often try to seek a link between policy goals and wishes and demands from societal actors, meanwhile acknowledging the primacy of local actors in defining values, strategies and collaborations.

4.4.3. Governance of nature

The governance model in the Democratic Nature discourse can be described as mosaic governance. Governmental organizations not only allow for a diversity of values, but also use a mosaic of different instruments to stimulate and facilitate initiatives for local stakeholders. In general, the focus is on stimulating open networks where groups of active citizens and social enterprises have the lead, and the primary role of the provinces is to facilitate and support such initiatives. Several provinces facilitate these developments themselves, other delegate facilitation to other organizations such as NGOs or social enterprises. The type of facilitation also varies, from facilitating learning trajectories, offering small grants or "seed-money", prize winning contests, help with crowd funding campaigns, or simply acknowledging the initiatives by providing them with some spotlight. In some provinces financial support is highly regulated with a focus on policy goals set by the province, while other schemes allow for true devolution of power to local communities.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. A diversification of discourses

Governmental discourses on nature conservation policy in the Netherlands have significantly changed over the last ten years. While the "Ecology First" discourse is still clearly visible, it is complemented in most provinces with discourses that emphasize the importance of society for nature. When looking at the role of societal engagements in Dutch nature conservation policy, one can clearly witness a diversification -or even fragmentation- of policy discourses, also as a result of decentralization processes. These developments in discourse can be typified both as a diversification in terms of the dominant modes of governance as well as a diversification in the values of nature (see Fig. 1).

Based on our analyses of policy documents, interviews with all 12 provincial governments and a series of workshops, we distinguish four policy discourses on nature conservation. Only the Partnerships for Nature discourse - an adapted version of the traditional "Ecology First" discourse – is fully focused on the intrinsic values of nature and the protection of habitats and its biodiversity. However, even in this discourse, responsibilities for nature conservation have broadened from primarily a governmental task towards a shared responsibility between government and society. This can be compared to other European countries, where considerable criticism on a strict top-down implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directive gave a considerable impetus or need for a change and contributed to a shift towards a more inclusive approaches (Ferranti et al., 2014; Suškevičs et al., 2013).

In the three other discourses we distinguish, biodiversity is only *one* of the values nature conservation policy aims for, next to instrumental and/or relational values. For example, in the Green Economy discourse, the instrumental values of nature are recognized and capitalized upon. As in other European countries, this discourse often manifests in a smaller role for central authorities and more emphasis on privatization and individual responsibilities of citizens (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Turnhout et al., 2015). With its focus on 'Natural Capital' and ' Ecosystems service, it fits very well in the EU Biodiversity Strategy (2010 – 2020; 2020–2030) (EC, 2020). '*We humans are part of, and fully dependent on, this web of life: it gives us the food we eat, filters the water we drink, and supplies the air we breathe' (p.2)*.

The Democratic Nature discourse focuses on direct democracy, mosaic governance, and the "energetic society" (Hajer et al., 2015). In the field of nature conservation, such ideals are also reflected in the UK's community forests (Ambrose-Oji et al., 2011) as well as in French discourses on nature conservation (Cremer-Schulte and Dissart, 2015). Finally, the discourse on Relational Nature emphasizes the strong relation between local culture and the landscape (Weber, 2015), which is perceived as part of people's identity and formed through a wide variety of social-ecological interactions (Van der Sluis, 2017). This relation is well recognized in various landscape approaches (Arts et al., 2017), but often ignored in European policy frameworks such as the Common Agricultural Policy or the Habitat Directive. The discourse on Relational Nature is also underlying the Natur Parken in Germany and French Regional parks with their focus on the importance of landscapes for the cultural identity of local people as well as for tourism.

Also recent changes in modes of governance in the Netherlands are comparable to developments in other European countries, where a somewhat similar shift towards decentralization and inclusion of the views of diverse societal actors can be observed (Bouwma, 2018). The attention for public participation and active citizenship as well as budget cuts on public services and an emphasis on self-sustaining business models for such services are also visible elsewhere in the field of nature conservation (Apostolopoulou et al., 2014). While our analysis is focused on the Netherlands, it can thus be linked to broader European and international trends such as a rise in neoliberalism (Turnhout et al., 2015), increase in democratization (Selin and Van Deveer, 2015) and

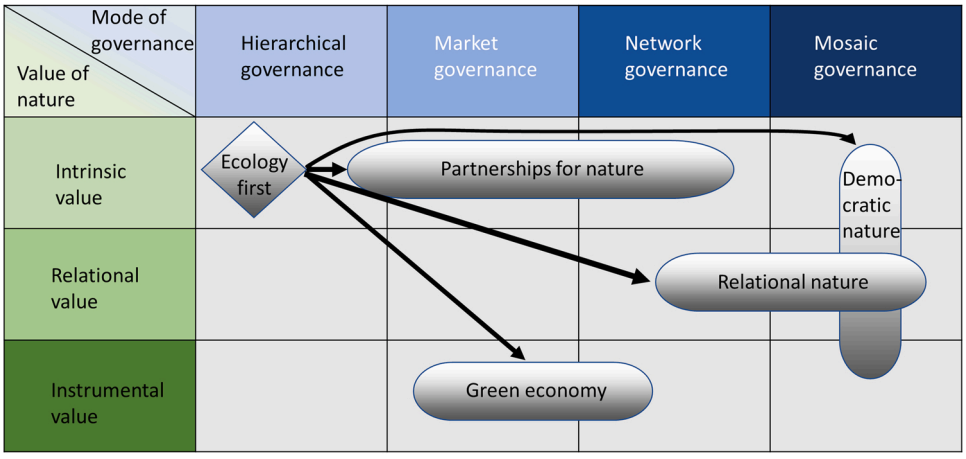

Fig. 1. Relationship between values of nature and mode of governance in Dutch nature conservation discourses.

changing urban – rural relationships (Verburg et al., 2010).

Not only such international trends influence the change in policy discourses, also national and regional *political* and *economic* factors may explain for such changes. Politically, each province has its own parliament and ruling parties. Some governing coalitions place a stronger emphasis on a small government and self-supporting business models for delivering public goods, while others focus more on democratic innovations and societal inclusion. This is in line with previous studies, showing that political developments do matter when it comes to the development of environmental policies (Knill et al., 2010) – and this has also been noted in our discussions with provinces (Folkert et al., 2020; Folkert and Boonstra, 2017).

Socio-economic circumstances matter as well. First, this includes the economic context of the region. Provinces where most large cities and industry are situated focus more on the Green Economy Discourse and some rural provinces more strongly emphasize the Relational Nature discourse. Resources matter as well: some provinces have more money available than others, and we see that provinces with less resources tend to focus more on the Partnerships for Nature discourse and their formal policy responsibilities, while those with more resources also reflect other discourses.

5.2. Relations between governance modes and values of nature

When empirically analysing the discourses in all twelve regions, it becomes clear that modes of governance and values of nature are related (see also in Table 1). This relationship between modes of governance and values of nature should be considered as a two-way relationship where each influences the other. First, changing modes of governance induce changes in the values incorporated in policy. Devolution and budget cuts as a result of the economic crisis of 2008 signaled a search for additional resources and partners to contribute to nature conservation policies (Apostolopoulou et al., 2014). Indeed, all discourses we identified seek to motivate new partners - business, active citizens or NGOs – to contribute to governmental nature conservation aims and policies. Provinces clearly are aware of this need to be more flexible in the values they aim to protect. As a result, most discourses explicitly allow for a broadened set of values of nature included in policy. For the Green Economy and the Relational Nature discourses, such new values have taken center stage in several provincial policy plans.

The Democratic Nature discourse is based on more idealistic arguments about the democratic need to include stakeholders and their ideas and values. The mosaic governance approach often applied in this discourse is very open and flexible towards incorporating values of nature as articulated by active citizens and social enterprises. This is in line with international experiences that show that broadening the range of actors will only be successful if conservation opens up for values and interests of new partners, as is well documented for agroecological practices (Runhaar et al., 2017), other businesses (Snep et al., 2009) as well as active citizens (Buijs et al., 2019).

On the other hand, changing values of nature may also influence modes of governance. The literature highlights how diverse relationships with the landscape provide important motivations for citizens and other societal actors, to become active in nature conservation (Mattijssen et al. 2020). Addressing these values requires policy makers to provide a stronger say to local stakeholders through interactive forms of governance. Over the years, many good practices have developed for network governance with professional organizations and businesses, such as farmers, waterboards and enterprises (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). Collaborating with the diversity of social enterprises or active citizens is a more recent challenge. To acknowledge for the differences in aims, expertise, and culture, forms of mosaic governance may need to be further developed (Buijs et al., 2019). This is especially true for the Democratic Nature discourse, in which local groups have the power to decide which values of nature they want to protect, resulting in an amalgam of different aims and practices. Many provinces are still experimenting on how to relate to citizen initiatives and social enterprises that spontaneously emerge from society. They may focus on mutual learning, offering financial support, increase status and recognition of initiatives through prize winning contests or formal visits from representatives of the province or actively link them to other stakeholders who can offer resources the initiatives may lack. What instruments work best is still to be evaluated (Buijs et al., 2019; Folkert and Boonstra, 2017).

Changing values relate to changing modes of governance in other discourses as well. In the Relational Nature discourse, governments relate nature conservation to cultural identity. Because these values materialize in local communities, a focus on the vitality of rural areas, cultural identity, and health benefits almost inevitably implies community engagements and collaboration with local stakeholders. In addition, the emergence of ecosystem services and Natural Capital approaches, embedded in a neo-liberal focus on instrumental values of nature (Turnhout et al., 2015; Apostolopoulou et al., 2014) opened up discursive spaces for a shift towards market governance approaches with a strong focus on collaboration with business to provide for additional resources.

5.3. Lessons learnt

The Dutch situation shows that nature policies can and should reflect a broader set of nature values and governance modes in order to increase the societal involvement in nature protection. Awareness of the broad spectrum of values that stakeholders attribute to nature can assist policy makers in linking up with diverse stakeholders in the implementation of policy. The employment of various modes of governance can be beneficial to such aims. However, effectively engaging with these stakeholders will require an open mind and a willingness to negotiate values and policy goals, as well as a willingness to share power and responsibilities (Lebel et al., 2006).

At the same time, our analysis shows that provinces tend to 'pick and choose' the values and modes best suited to their own regional context. If the EU Biodiversity Strategy is to offer room to Member States for shaping policies to suit their own context, it should not be too narrowly formulated – and a similar logic holds for national policies. At present, however, the new EU Biodiversity Strategy (2020–2030) mostly reflects the Partnerships for Nature discourse and the Green Economy discourse, focussing on the intrinsic values and, more recently, instrumental values. Less attention appears to be given to Democratic Nature and Relational Nature discourses and the relational values embedded therein.

Furthermore, our analysis highlights that values of nature and governance modes are interrelated in policy practices. If governments expect society to contribute and share the responsibility for nature protection, this will inevitably also affect the values their own policy focus on. On the other hand, societal partners should also be aware that engaging with policy makers will require them to respect the values embedded in policy. This is an essential element of co-operation with others, that you engross yourself in their values, wishes and expectations and are willing to change your own perspective (Puerari et al., 2018). This is especially true from the perspective of the Democratic Nature and Relational Nature discourses.

While our work offers valuable lessons, we would like to end this discussion with some methodological remarks. Of course, our descriptions of the four discourses - like any categorization - are ideal types. Discourses written down in policies and real-life discourses between people are much more complex, blurry and less well defined. Often, they overlap or reflect bits and pieces of the four discourses outlined in this paper. In addition, the clear focus on societal engagement of this paper, as well as in the empirical studies on which our analyses are based, may have influenced the outcomes of our analysis. When looking for change, one can expect to find change. Although some elements of Dutch nature conservation discourses have remained the

same, and policies related to Natura2000 sites still have a strong focus on the intrinsic value of nature, we feel certain in our conclusion that the hegemony of this discourse has changed towards a much more diversified set of discourses, policies and conservation practices.

5.4. Conclusions

Ten years of decentralization and a collective search for more societal engagement have resulted in a diversification of nature conservation policy discourses in the Netherlands. While previously an "Ecology First" discourse was hegemonic, with a hierarchical mode of governance and a strong focus on intrinsic values, other discourses have emerged. Different modes of governance are now championed within different discourses and in different provinces. Interestingly, changes in modes of governance are clearly related to changes in values of nature: The need for new partners forces governments to open up for new values of nature. And changing values of nature allows for, and sometimes demands, opening up of governance structures to new actors, such as businesses or citizens. In all, the interrelationship between governance and values in combination with the ongoing search for new partners and alliances signals the need for governments to critically evaluate dominant modes of governance as well as dominant values of nature. The two cannot be separated.

Unfortunately, no golden bullet exists, and physical, economic, political and social contexts will influence the search for increased societal engagements. This also implies the need for the European Union to allow for such diverging modes of governance. Although the increasing focus on Green Economy at the European level may be a first step in such diversification, Europe needs to develop additional strategies to allow for diversification of values in order to include all stakeholders from society. If next to businesses, governments also want to strengthen relationships with local communities, they need to relate more strongly to relational values associated with cultural identity and social cohesion, health and well-being, local food practices, and a Do-It-Yourself mentality of many people. No diversification in values without diversification in modes of governance. The quest for societal engagement in nature conservation policies continues.

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