

CHANGING CULTURE, STABLE STRUCTURE

Segmented pluralism on the Dutch airwaves

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ABSTRACT: In this contribution we deal with the contradiction between changing culture and stable structure, i.e., the phenomenon that a social structure that developed to accommodate a certain culture may remain stable over a long period of time, even when that culture changes. We do so for the case of the Dutch public broadcasting system, that was designed in the 1920s to fit with the segmented pluralism of Dutch society, in which a number of religiously and ideologically different groups had to peacefully co-exist. In the mid-1960s, Dutch society started to change rapidly and segmented pluralism started to wane. The public broadcasting system, however, hardly changed until today. First we explain how structure and culture initially matched and how the concept of path dependency can explain how over time culture and structure can grow apart. Then, with data of six national surveys between 1979 and 2005, we explore the possible cultural grounds for the fact that the segmented public broadcasting system has outlived the segmented pluralism of Dutch society that it was originally designed to match.

Key words: public broadcasting; segmented pluralism; social structure; culture; correspondence analysis; longitudinal analysis

1. Introduction

European history shows that deep divisions and severe differences of opinion within societies need not necessarily lead to civil war. Competing religious, ethnic, linguistic and ideological groups in society may have severe – even irreconcilable – differences, but may still manage to co-exist peacefully. One way to achieve this is through segmented pluralism, or – in its most crystallized out form – pillarization. In a pillarized society, social structure makes sure that the rank and file of each group (or ‘pillar’) hardly need to mingle with people from outside their own group. Each group tends to have for example its own newspapers, hospitals, labour unions, political parties, sports clubs, schools and universities. The group is the main locus

of social identification, not society as a whole. Solving society's overarching problems is left to the elites of the groups, who negotiate compromises with the elites of the other groups. The socio-cultural sub-communities do compete with each other, but are also willing to accommodate each other and reach compromises (Lijphart 1975; Andeweg and Irwin 2009).

In the twentieth century, segmented pluralism was found in many Northern and Central European countries that were not part of the communist bloc. Hallin and Mancini (2004), who did a comparative study on the historic relations between the political and media systems in 18 Western countries, coined this system of long-standing multi-party democracies with strong traditions of consensus-seeking and compromise as the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model. In these countries an ideologically plural and partisan press developed, that was closely linked to the sub-communities it served (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In the case of The Netherlands, radio and television were also institutionally linked to these sub-communities. In this, the Dutch case of segmented pluralism is both exemplary – given the communalities with other democratic-corporatist countries as defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004) – and exceptional – given the extent to which segmented pluralism got institutionalized in the social structure.

Since the mid-1960s, however, Europe has experienced a cultural revolution that led to declining loyalty to existing institutions that used to structure social life in many European countries (Williams 2005). In most Northern and Central European countries, including The Netherlands, increasing secularization and individualization rapidly reduced the level of segmented pluralism in society (Lijphart 1975). As a consequence, the partisanship of the press was strongly reduced (Hallin and Mancini 2004), but the Dutch public broadcasting structure remained unchanged, as if the state of segmented pluralism never came to an end.

It is this contradiction between changing culture and stable structure, which we want to shed some light on in this article. But first, we will elaborate on the development of the Dutch public broadcasting system in the light of the concept of path dependency – which can explain how culture and structure can grow apart. After that, we will present our research into possible cultural grounds for the fact that the segmented public broadcasting system has outlived the segmented pluralism of Dutch society.

1.1. Development of the Dutch public broadcasting system in the light of the concept of path dependency

The concept of path dependency explains how actual choices and decisions are to a certain extent determined by choices and decisions

made in the past. It illustrates that history is an important elucidator in the analysis of political and media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Social systems have strong self-reinforcing feedback mechanisms that make that large consequences may result from relatively small or contingent events in the past, that occurred at 'the right time' (Pierson 2004). Afterwards this 'right time' will often be identified as a critical juncture, a period of significant change that is hypothesized to have brought about a distinct legacy (Collier and Collier 1991: 27–39).

The Dutch public broadcasting system started to develop just after such a critical juncture in Dutch history, that is, just after the Dutch version of segmented pluralism had crystallized out. Fundamental controversies concerning issues of universal suffrage and state funding for private – mostly confessional – schools proportional to enrolments had just been peacefully settled. The settlement of these issues boosted the institutionalization of segmented pluralism, partly because it gave the different social and political groups the means to mobilize their masses politically, and to educate them within their own religious or ideological sphere (Lijphart 1975; Wintle 2000). This also paved the path for the solution of the broadcasting issue and produced the framework within which future choices and decisions would be made.

The concept of path dependency posits that, initially, just before something is going to get changed in society, there are always many possible outcomes of the process that leads to that change (Pierson 2004). Then, as people or groups of people start acting in a chain of events that leads to change, relatively small actions can have relatively large and long-lasting consequences, because they occur at the right time – when change is afoot. Other people may react and may be able to influence the chain of events, but as more and more people react and start getting positive feedback, the chain of events starts converging on equilibrium. People trying to steer events in another direction – trying to lead events along a different path – are finding it increasingly difficult to do so, and in the long run, after equilibrium has been reached, they are no longer able to make changes, even if those changes would constitute considerable improvements (Pierson 2004).

So, when radio came along, social groups started to act. Liberal conservatives established the first radio station in 1923 (HDO, later renamed AVRO). These liberal conservatives opted to build a national broadcasting organization much like the then newly formed BBC in the UK. But they were thwarted by Protestants and Catholics. Protestants and Catholics recognized radio as an excellent instrument to give segmented pluralism a cultural dimension. The recent settlement of the issue of state funding for private schools suggested a similar solution of the radio issue; a segmented pluralist broadcasting system. One by one the pillars

established their own broadcasting associations. The Protestants established NCRV (1924), the Catholics KRO (1925), and the socialists followed suit with VARA (1925). With every new broadcasting association that was established, shifting away from a pillarized broadcasting system became increasingly difficult, because the system started to become self-reinforcing – giving positive feedback to an increasing proportion of the population and politicians. In 1926, a fraction of liberal Protestants established their own broadcasting association, VPRO, and that was it. Every major socio-cultural group in society had its own broadcasting association, and the liberal conservatives were caught in a broadcasting system they had not intended when they were the first to act. In 1930, after fierce debate, government did not choose to install a national broadcasting system like the BBC, but decided to allocate airtime to the pillarized broadcasting associations on two national radio channels. The Protestants (NCRV), Catholics (KRO), socialists (VARA) and liberal conservatives (AVRO) each got one-fifth of the available airtime. A tenth of the airtime was allocated to the liberal Protestants' VPRO, and the last tenth was used for an umbrella organization that aired programs such as the news. Equilibrium was reached and the public broadcasting system became impervious to change, until the 1960s. When television was introduced in the Dutch public broadcasting system in 1951, nothing changed. In the heydays of segmented pluralism, the public broadcasting system was extremely self-reinforcing (De Brauw 1974; Browne 1989; Wijfjes 1994; Brants and McQuail 1997; Van der Eijk 2000; Bardoel 2001, 2008; Van der Haak and Van Snippenburg 2001).

In the 1960s, however, the segmented pluralism in Dutch society started to wane. New worldviews evolved and the old ones were no longer subscribed to by a large proportion of the population. At the same time, illegal commercial broadcasters airing from the North Sea started delivering entertainment oriented radio and television programming targeted at the Dutch audience. Many people tuned in to these commercial programs and thus escaped the pillarized broadcasting system (Van der Eijk 2000). Originally, government cracked down hard on these 'pirate' stations on the high seas. However, it became apparent that the pillarized public broadcasting system was no longer taken for granted. Dutch society was changing rapidly, whereas the public broadcasting system was still based on the segmented pluralism of the 1920s and 1930s (Bardoel et al. 1975; De Goede 1999). The use of the public broadcasting system no longer gave positive feedback to a large segment of the Dutch population. A growing proportion of the population did no longer recognize one of the existing broadcasting associations as 'their own'. Thus the system was no longer completely self-reinforcing and thus the door to change stood ajar.

The pillar-bound public broadcasting associations were no longer self-evidently presumed to represent all socio-cultural segments of society, so the system was changed in the mid-1960s. It was not completely overhauled, though. The Dutch had by then experienced that socio-cultural pluralism in society could well be translated to socio-cultural pluralism on the airwaves, with a number of public broadcasting associations that represented the socio-cultural segments of society. In that respect, the system was still self-reinforcing and impervious to change. The existing broadcasting associations of the pillars all remained in the public broadcasting system, but new associations were also allowed to enter – provided that they could substantiate a claim to represent a socio-cultural segment of society through a significant membership. So because a system of segmented pluralism was already established long before, the system that was recreated in the 1960s was again a system of segmented pluralism. Three new broadcasting associations eventually joined the system. TROS (1966) represented a membership of people who turned their backs on highbrow culture and embraced popular culture. EO (1970) represented more orthodox Protestants than NCRV (the original Protestant broadcasting association) did, and Veronica (1975) represented a secular and hedonistic movement among Dutch youths (Van der Eijk 2000). The existing liberal Protestant VPRO gradually changed its identity into a broadcasting association for the secular, nonconformist and libertarian segment of society.

An unintended consequence of the new system, that allocated scarce radio and television airtime based on the membership numbers of the broadcasting associations, was that the system fuelled intense competition between the broadcasting associations – they competed for the members that they needed to remain in the system. As a consequence, the broadcasting associations, in terms of their programming, became more alike (Manschot 1993; Van der Eijk 2000). In all, the main consequence of the competition between broadcasting associations was that the original pillar identity of the old broadcasting associations from the 1920s further eroded.

In 1989, the European Union forced the introduction of commercial radio and television in The Netherlands. As a result, in less than two decades, the radio and television landscape changed drastically (Nuijten 2007; Bardeel 2008). The commercial channels targeting the Dutch market soon outnumbered the public channels. Broadcasting association Veronica (representing secular and hedonistic youths) left the public broadcasting system to become a commercial station in 1995. BNN replaced Veronica as a public broadcasting association representing secular and hedonistic youths, in 1998. Finally, in 2005, MAX entered the system as a broadcasting association representing older people, and LLiNK

entered the system, representing people who demanded attention for ecology, ethical distribution of wealth and human rights. The latter broadcasting association disappeared from the system again, in 2010.

Currently, the pillars that once segmented Dutch society may have largely collapsed, but the public broadcasting system that originated in the segmented pluralism of the pillars is still held up. In that respect, culture and structure have grown apart, which may in part be explained with the idea behind the concept of path dependency, that relatively small events – Protestants, Catholics and socialists starting their own broadcasting associations – can have large and long-lasting consequences when they occur at the right time (Pierson 2004) – in the 1920s, just after the critical junction of segmented pluralism being grafted onto the Dutch institutional landscape. To what extent the public broadcasting associations represent current socio-cultural pluralism in society, however, is unclear. Nevertheless, minister Plasterk (2007), responsible for media at the time, argued that diversity in broadcast media could still best be warranted by broadcasting associations representing socio-cultural segments of society. However, in the extremely competitive television landscape of The Netherlands, public broadcasting only has a market share of about one-third – thereby being the strongest group though, far beyond RTL/Bertelsmann (about a quarter) and SBS/Sanoma Group (about 15%) (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2012: 11). Moreover, only half of the Dutch households is listed as member of one of the public broadcasting associations. Thus, it figures to ask to what extent the current public broadcasting system still reflects the socio-cultural pluralism in Dutch society.

1.2. Research question

In this study, we will investigate socio-cultural changes in Dutch society at large between 1979 and 2005, and specifically focus on the membership of the public broadcasting associations. Did the membership of these associations follow the main socio-cultural trends in Dutch society, or have they veered off in another direction? Society has changed, but not all of its institutions have changed at the same pace. Therefore we want to know if the socio-cultural pluralism of Dutch society is still echoed by the public broadcasting system that has its roots in the socio-cultural pluralism of the 1920s. Ideally we would investigate this with data from the whole radio and television era, but we only have data from 1979 up until 2005. But that does not prevent us from investigating the cultural undercurrents that also kept the public broadcasting system afloat since 1979, and that may well prove treacherous and sink it in the near future.

2. Method

2.1. Data

To describe socio-cultural changes in the membership of the Dutch broadcasting associations, we used data from a unique longitudinal series of national social surveys that were held in The Netherlands between 1979 and 2005 by the name of *Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands* (Eisinga et al. 1992, 1999, 2002, 2012). These data contain many scales with the help of which people can be characterized socio-culturally, like their values, conservatism and religiousness. The data also record the respondents' membership of broadcasting associations, thus making these data ideal to study the socio-cultural composition of the membership of the Dutch broadcasting associations over time.

The samples of all surveys were random samples. In 2005 a sample was drawn by the postal services from a list of all addresses of households in The Netherlands. Subsequently, within each household, the adult was selected that was the last one to have celebrated his or her birthday. The previous samples were two-stage stratified random samples from the population register. For these samples, municipalities were randomly chosen from all regions in The Netherlands and varying in degree of urbanization. Next these municipalities drew a random sample from their population register. In this procedure the sizes of the samples that the municipalities had to draw, were specified to result in a total sample representative of all regions and degrees of urbanization in The Netherlands. Since part of the socio-cultural segments of the Dutch population tend to live in specific regions of The Netherlands, this procedure has most probably resulted in a representative sample of the population and all of its socio-cultural segments. The people in the samples were approached and interviewed face-to-face by trained interviewers. Response rates of the surveys varied between 44 and 58%. When the samples thus realized were compared to census data, all samples proved representative as to gender. As to age and marital state, slight deviations from the census distributions were observed. No census data were available that could have served to assess the representativeness of the samples for the socio-cultural segments of society, so we can only assume representativeness. For more information on the samples, see Eisinga et al. (1992, 1999, 2002, 2012) and Felling et al. (1986, 1987).

The number of complete cases for our analyses varies from the minimum of 829 in 2000, to the maximum of 2102 in 1990. Thus we had to weigh the data to prevent that some surveys dominated our analyses while others were being bogged down. In our analyses we only used questions that were posed in identical wordings over the whole

period of time. Data reduction and construction were carried out on the data of all years together.¹

The variables with which we characterized the membership of the broadcasting associations were adherence to traditional achievement values, traditional family values, social criticism and hedonism (all Likert scales); subscription to a Christian worldview, subscription to an immanent worldview, denial of the meaning of life, and denial of the meaning of sorrow, suffering and death (all Likert scales); salience of one's religious or non-religious worldview (Likert scale); church membership (Catholic, Protestant, other Christian church, not a church member); opposition to a tougher trade union policy, and opposition to income and status equalization (both Likert scales); favouring of restriction of civil liberties, and rejection of intervention in matters of life and death (both probabilistic scalograms); a traditional view on women (Likert scale); political orientation to the left or right (left, middle, right); and years of age.

Since most of the characteristics were measured with scales of presumed interval level, we used fuzzy coding (Murtagh 2005: 77–92; cf. doubling in Greenacre 2007: 177–84) to transform all variables except the nominal variables (church and broadcasting association membership) to categorical variables in a linear fashion. That is, we replaced each variable with two stand-in variables; one for each end of the scale. To that end, we calculated the length of the range of values of the scale, the minimum value, and the maximum value of the scale. Subsequently, the stand-in variable for the lower end of the scale was calculated as the maximum minus the actual value, which was then divided by the length of the range. The stand-in variable for the higher end of the scale was calculated as the actual value minus the minimum, which was then also divided by the length of the range. This way the scores of the two stand-in variables indicate how far or close the value of the original variable was removed from the two extremes of the scale.

2.2. Analysis

A double-time LONG Burt matrix (Konig 2010) of the characteristics was created and analysed with joint correspondence analysis (Greenacre 1988, 2006, 2007). Time was included as six active rows and columns, and the broadcasting associations were included in the analysis as passive rows for every of the six points in time. The matrix was analysed with the use of the R package *CA* by Nenadić and Greenacre (2006). This enabled us to

1. The actual data reduction and construction are not reported in this manuscript because that would make this manuscript unnecessarily long. Those who are interested are most welcome to contact the first author.

explore the socio-culturally changing membership of the Dutch broadcasting associations within the context of the socio-culturally changing Dutch society, over time (Konig 2010).

We estimated a three-dimensional solution. In these three dimensions 90.6% of the inertia was depicted. The cloud of points in these three dimensions resembles a long sausage. The first dimension is about 10 times as important as the second and third dimension. Therefore, we only present our interpretation of the first dimension.² We present the solution in two plots. Figure 1 depicts the socio-cultural changes in Dutch society between 1979 and 2005. For clarity's sake, the broadcasting associations are not plotted in Figure 1, because that would have rendered the plot too cluttered with points and accompanying labels. Figure 1 serves to study the main socio-cultural trends in The Netherlands over time, or in other words, to interpret the first dimension of our joint correspondence analysis solution. In Figure 2, the membership of the broadcasting associations are plotted once for every survey. The interpretation of the first dimension of this figure is identical to the interpretation of the first dimensions of Figure 1. Thus Figure 2 serves to study the socio-culturally changing membership of the broadcasting associations within the context of the changing Dutch society.

3. Results

3.1. Changing society

To be able to interpret Figure 1, we have to explain some features of the figure first. The first dimension is displayed vertically. The figure can be interpreted by comparing the positions of the categories of the variables, relative to the origin of the figure (where the dotted lines cross). When two categories of two different variables are positioned in the figure in roughly the same direction from the origin of the figure (i.e., the lines that connect both categories to the origin, constitute an acute angle), they are relatively often found in combination. For example, 'Protestant' and '1979' both lie in roughly the same direction when seen from the origin. Categories that are at opposite sides of the origin (i.e., the lines that connect both categories to the origin, constitute an obtuse angle) are relatively seldom found in combination. For instance, 'not a church member' and '1979' are located in opposite directions from the origin. Thus, in 1979 it was more common to encounter a Protestant than someone who was not a member of a Christian church. Further, as

2. An extended version of this contribution, in which we also interpret the second and third dimension, can be obtained from the first author.

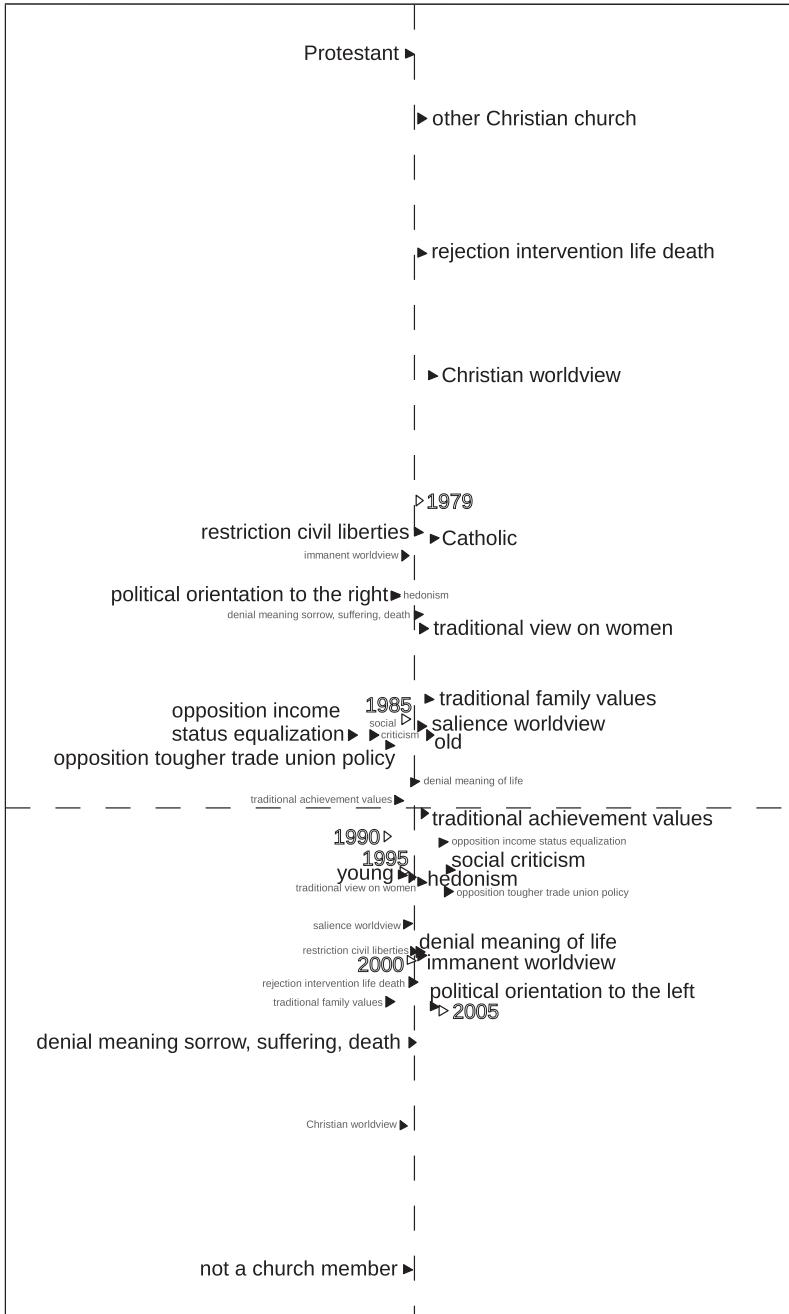


Figure 1. Socio-cultural changes in Dutch society.

categories lie further from the origin, the co-occurrences with other categories are stronger. Using this logic, one can see that in 1979, the chance that a respondent was Protestant was higher than in 1985, because 1979 lies at a greater distance from the origin than 1985. Also, the size of the labels in the figure is meaningful. The high ends of the fuzzy-coded scales in this figure are marked with big labels, and the low ends of these scales are marked with small labels. For instance, near the top of the figure, we see a strong Christian worldview (big label), and near the bottom, at the other side of the origin, we see a weak Christian worldview (small label). This means that in 1979 it was much more probable to meet someone with a Christian world view, than in 2005. Finally, it should be noted that time advances from the top to the bottom of the figure. This is not an artefact but a result of our analysis. For that reason, the distance between corresponding categories with large and small labels can be interpreted as a change in society over time.

Bearing this in mind, the first dimension in [Figure 1](#) may be interpreted as representing the socio-cultural process of individualization. We want to explicitly discuss three aspects of individualization that we see in the figure.

The first aspect is de-institutionalization. De-institutionalization comprises of a mitigation of traditional ties that bind people to institutions like the church. Weakening links between individuals and such institutions indicate an increasing autonomy of individuals in their direct social context; hence de-institutionalization is an aspect of individualization (Felling 2004). In the 1960s, a process of de-institutionalization set in. Dutch churches started to lose their appeal to the new generations (Dekker et al. 1997, 2004; Andeweg 1999; Luther and Deschouwer 1999; Felling 2004; Dekker and De Hart 2006). In [Figure 1](#), one can see that this process continued after 1979. This is exemplified by the church members near the top of the figure and the people who are not a member of a church near the bottom.

The second aspect of individualization that we recognize in the figure is de-traditionalization. Weakening links between individuals and traditional ideas indicate an increasing autonomy of individuals with respect to the culture they grew up in; hence de-traditionalization is an aspect of individualization too (Felling 2004). In the 1960s, new generations of adults threw a large number of traditional ideas overboard. They no longer automatically followed in their parents' traditional footsteps. This sparked a cultural revolution (Dekker et al. 1997; Felling 2004; Dekker and De Hart 2006), which seems to have raged on until well after 1979. In [Figure 1](#), we see a top-down erosion of the Christian worldview and a simultaneous strengthening of an immanent worldview. The shrinking subscription to a traditional view on women and traditional family values, the diminishing

support for restriction of civil liberties, and the decreasing rejection of interventions in matters of life and death (like abortion and euthanasia) also indicate this trend of de-traditionalization. The increasing denial of the meaning of life, sorrow, suffering, and death points in this direction too.

The third and last aspect of individualization that can be discerned in Figure 1 is fragmentation, the diminishing importance of people's worldview for their everyday life (Felling 2004). This too, started in the 1960s (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau 1998; Keuzenkamp et al. 2004) and continued well after 1979. It can be recognized in the figure as the waning of perceived salience of people's religious or non-religious worldview for their day-to-day life.

3.2. Changing membership of broadcasting associations

Within the context of this changing Dutch society, the membership of the Dutch broadcasting associations has changed as well. Figure 2 shows the shifting socio-cultural position of the membership of the broadcasting associations through the years. When we rotate Figure 2 a quarter of a turn (and after a scale transformation) it can be superimposed onto Figure 1. That means that the interpretation of the dimensions is the same as in Figure 1. Again, the points in the figure are clustered as a long sausage around the first dimension. Thus, again, we interpret only the first dimension of Figure 2 (horizontal).

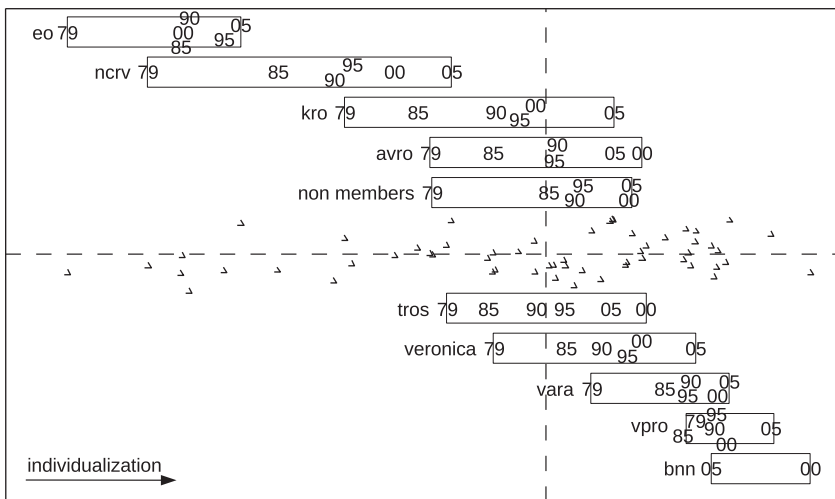


Figure 2. Socio-cultural changes in membership of broadcasting associations.

To simplify interpretation of Figure 2, the labels are not printed immediately next to the points, but a bit further away and sorted by broadcasting association. For example, the leftmost point is the point for the membership of EO (orthodox Protestant broadcasting association) in 1979. Its label can be found perpendicular to the horizontal axis above the point itself. As a consequence, it is easy to see how great individualization has made inroads into the membership of each broadcasting association over the past decades. To further simplify interpretation, a separate horizontal bar is drawn behind the labels of every broadcasting association. The length of these horizontal bars indicates the distance between the extreme positions through time for the membership of every broadcasting association.

As to the membership of the broadcasting associations, we can conclude from Figure 2 that the members of EO and NCRV are least individualized. These broadcasting associations are Protestant broadcasting associations. At the other side of the spectrum, the members of VARA, VPRO and BNN are most individualized. These broadcasting associations cater to the socialists (VARA), nonconformist libertarians (VPRO) and young hedonists (BNN). The middle ground is occupied by the members of AVRO (liberal conservatives) and TROS (embracing popular culture), and people who are not a member of a broadcasting association. The Catholic broadcasting association KRO bridges the gap between the Protestant broadcasting associations on the left, and AVRO and TROS in the middle. The membership of Veronica,³ a broadcasting association for young hedonists, bridges the gap between the associations in the middle and the ones on the right.

As to changes over time, some interesting observations can be made from Figure 2. It seems that, over time, the membership of every broadcasting association has become more individualized; not always in a linear fashion, but the end effect represents a considerable individualization. On the face of it, that result may seem hardly interesting, for our analyses already revealed such a trend for society as a whole. But from the grand societal trend, one cannot conclude that the membership of all broadcasting associations has individualized in a similar manner. The membership of individual broadcasting associations might have changed in another direction. In fact, the membership of one of the broadcasting associations did; BNN, a broadcasting association catering to the young. The membership of that broadcasting association has become less individualized between 2000 and 2005. However, this can hardly be called

3. Since 1995 Veronica is no longer a public broadcasting association, but people can still subscribe to *Veronica Magazine*, and may thus feel that they are a member of Veronica and indicate so in a questionnaire.

a trend, since BNN is a relatively new broadcasting association that was only represented in the last two surveys.

The membership of the religious broadcasting associations NCRV (Protestants) and KRO (Catholics) was subjected most strongly to the process of individualization. De-institutionalization, de-traditionalization and fragmentation have eroded the religious nature of the membership of these two broadcasting associations that originate in the pillarized broadcasting system of the 1920s and 1930s. The members of the Protestant NCRV are still more religious than the members of AVRO (liberal conservatives) and TROS (embracing popular culture), but with respect to individualization, the membership of the Catholic association KRO hardly differs from the members of AVRO and TROS anymore.

For most of the time, non-members were comparably individualized as the members of AVRO and TROS. For a short while around 1985, they were more individualized, but for the rest of the period, they were in step with the membership of AVRO and TROS.

4. Conclusion and discussion

Our analysis shows that during the last decades, Dutch society has strongly changed socio-culturally – and that the membership of the public broadcasting associations has changed with it. In our results, we see a clear trend towards individualization – a trend that other scholars have found as well (e.g., Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau 1998; Felling 2004). Our analysis also showed, that the socio-cultural changes in the membership of all public broadcasting associations resemble the socio-cultural changes in Dutch society at large. In short, that boils down to the conclusion that in the time span that our study covers, the membership of all broadcasting associations became increasingly individualized.

Based on our data from 1979 and 1985, Peters (1989; for comparable findings based on the 1979 data alone, see Felling et al. 1983) argued that within the Dutch public broadcasting system three distinct groups of broadcasting associations could be distinguished: (i) confessional broadcasting associations, (ii) ‘neutral’ broadcasting associations, and (iii) left-wing broadcasting associations. According to Peters each of these three groups of broadcasting associations had memberships with a distinct value set. In our analysis we can still distinguish these three groups of broadcasting associations in 2005. However, nowadays, the Catholic KRO seems to fit in with the group of neutral broadcasting associations better than with the confessional group.

Within the group of neutral broadcasting associations, the ideological positions of the membership of AVRO (liberal conservatives), TROS

(embracing popular culture), KRO (originally Catholic), as well as the ideological position of non-members, differ only modestly. The original broadcasting association of the liberal conservatives in the 1920s (AVRO) has gotten company of other broadcasting associations with like-minded memberships.

In the group of left-wing broadcasting associations, the ideological positions of the membership of BNN (young hedonists), VARA (socialists) and VPRO (nonconformist libertarians) are close together. So the original broadcasting association of the socialists (VARA) has also gotten company of other broadcasting associations with like-minded memberships. The socialist pillar has not disappeared altogether from the ether.

The group of confessional broadcasting associations changed strongest over time. As discussed before, KRO (originally Catholic) has moved towards the neutral broadcasting associations, which illustrates the strong erosion of the Catholic pillar. The Protestant pillar can still be recognized in the membership of the Protestant broadcasting associations, though. But since NCRV (Protestant) and EO (orthodox Protestant) differed in their pace of individualization, the gap between these two broadcasting associations got wider over time.

All in all, the answer to our research question can be, that major socio-cultural segments of society are still represented in the public broadcasting system that has its roots in the socio-cultural pluralism of the 1920s. In a broader sense, three such segments can be discerned, that all three of them are served by multiple broadcasting associations. Should the system have been designed from scratch in 2005, the Dutch system would probably have had only three or four public broadcasting associations – if the system would have comprised multiple broadcasting associations at all – one or two Protestant associations, a leftist association, and an association of the middle ground. History, however, explains why the present broadcasting system is not that simple – because it is path dependent (cf. Pierson 2004).

What stands out most prominently though, is that, *grosso modo*, the membership of most broadcasting associations have maintained their relative positions in relation to the membership of the other broadcasting associations. It is first and foremost the change of society as a whole, which has made the difference. It is the overall process of individualization that changed the membership of the public broadcasting associations.

A provoking thought is, that this process of individualization may have been co-authored by the public broadcasting system itself. The inclusion of television in the public broadcasting system in the 1950s – which was meant to preserve the segmented pluralism of Dutch society – may have functioned as a Trojan Horse. The segmented pluralism of the broadcasting associations lead to much less segregation in audiences for

television than it had for radio. There had always been two radio channels, one of which was shared by the religious, Catholic and Protestant broadcasting associations, and one by the secular, socialist and liberal associations. In the early years of television, however, only one television channel was available, and only in the evening, for all broadcasting associations together. As a result, most of the time when people wanted to watch television, they had no other option than to watch programs that were broadcast by associations representing other pillars than their own. Thus, with the advancing diffusion of television in the 1950s and 1960s, people were increasingly exposed to messages from the other pillars. Further and contrary to radio, broadcasting associations did not have the means to produce all the programs for television by themselves. Consequently, the associations bought part of their television programs from abroad, which further increased people's exposure to messages from outside their own pillar. In turn, this may have eased people away from their own pillar; weakening their links to the institutions and traditional ideas of their own socio-cultural subgroup in society. Thus, after the introduction of television, the pillarized public broadcasting system may well have added to the process of individualization and the demise of segmented pluralism in Dutch society (Bank 1994; Bardoel 1994a,b, 2008; Van der Eijk 2000).

So well into the 1960s, segmented pluralism was still a major societal force in The Netherlands, that stood at the cradle of the public broadcasting system in the 1920s and nursed it into adulthood in the decades thereafter. Recognizing the role of Protestants, Catholics, and socialists, the theory of path dependency can explain why the system developed as it did. Had the liberal conservatives been the only ones to act, the system might have been much more like the BBC. But having developed as it did, the system became self-reinforcing and did not change anymore until the 1960s, when individualization struck home. The system was modified a number of times, but the principle of multiple broadcasting associations that each represented a socio-cultural segment of society was upheld – which is plausible from the perspective of the theory of path dependency. In the following decades – the decades of our empirical study – individualization raged on and commercial broadcasting was introduced next to the public system. But the public system, in essence, hardly changed. Our data suggest that even after four decades of increasing individualization, in 2005, the system was still capable of representing major socio-cultural segments of society on the air. Culture may have changed tremendously over the past decades, but the fact that there are still cultural differences within society fits the structure – a structure that hardly changed at all.

Individualization, however, does pose a major problem for the system. After all, individualization pries people loose from their socio-cultural segments of society. People will experience their segment's sub-cultural heritage and institutions – like its broadcasting association – less and less as part of their own identity. As a consequence membership of one's own segment's broadcasting association is less and less capable of providing positive feedback, and thus the public broadcasting system is becoming ever more in danger of losing its self-reinforcing quality. And once that point is reached – even if the system represents major socio-cultural segments of society on the air – change is possible again, according to path dependency theory. Thus individualization, which may in part have been brought about by the public broadcasting system itself, will eventually be the present public broadcasting system's undoing. Already, voices that suggest to fundamentally change the system are getting louder and louder. Suggestions as to how the system should be changed are varied. Some say that the number of broadcasting associations should be brought down and existing associations should merge; government recently has adopted this suggestion. Others say that the system should be overhauled completely and that a national public broadcasting system like the BBC should be created. The situation is increasingly starting to become like a situation in which many outcomes are possible and relatively small actions can have relatively large consequences once again, simply because they occur at the right time.

With our research we have demonstrated how in The Netherlands – as an example of a Northern/Central European democratic corporatist society as identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) – a segmented pluralist social structure was capable to adapt to a changing socio-cultural composition of the population, without the need to fundamentally change. However, when fundamental cultural changes like individualization threaten the democratic corporatist character of society, as they do now, structural change may in the end be warranted.

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