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A short history of Dutch forest policy: The 'de-institutionalisation' of a policy arrangement

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ABSTRACT

Over the past thirty years, forest policy in the Netherlands has almost entirely been integrated into nature policy. This process of 'de-institutionalisation' is surprising in view of widely accepted theories of institutional stability and 'path dependency'. The process is investigated in this paper along the four dimensions of the policy arrangement approach: discourse, power, rules and actors. It is argued that a *discursive shift*, moving the focus from production forest to 'forest as part of nature' and fuelled by a number of underlying factors, lies at the heart of the process. In concordance with this shift, advocates of timber autarky lost power in favour of 'nature advocates'. A more diverse set of actors became involved in forest policy, also reflecting a more general trend in Dutch politics towards greater openness and the erosion of neo-corporatist rules. Thus, changes in all four dimensions of the policy arrangement worked into one direction. This may explain the unusually quick and radical 'de-institutionalisation' of Dutch forest policy.

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1. Introduction

Forest policy has a relatively short history in the Netherlands. The French Forestry Act, for example, was established in 1827, whereas the first law to protect the forests in the Netherlands was not established until 1917. This law was called the '*Nood Boschwet*' (Urgency Forest Law). Considering the relatively low importance of the forest sector in the Netherlands, this may be not entirely surprising. In fact, at the moment only 10% of the country is covered with forests. For example, Germany now has around 30% of forest area whereas France has around 25%.

More surprising, however, is the observation that much of what had been built up in this field in the first half of the twentieth century already started to be deconstructed in the last quarter of the same century. Since the 1970s, forests and forestry as an independent theme in Dutch policy has rapidly lost significance and visibility. Whereas timber production used to be the dominant focus in the early days, forest policy in the Netherlands nowadays is almost entirely subsumed under nature conservation. As will be demonstrated in more detail below, the shift is reflected in the names and themes of major policy documents, but also in departmental organisation and in the organisation of the expert system around forests. Within a tree's lifetime, in other words, we witness a process of institutionalisation and subsequent *de-institutionalisation* of forest policy in the Netherlands.

This paper seeks to describe and explain this process of de-institutionalisation. Although it focuses on the Dutch forestry case, its relevance goes beyond this substantive and geographical scope. After all, it is quite rare that well-established policy sectors simply vanish over time. Normally, well-established sectors tend to show patterns of

institutional stability and path dependency (Downs, 1967; March and Olsen, 1989; Schmidt, 2005). To learn more about this process of de-institutionalisation of a sector, the policy arrangement approach (PAA) will be employed below. This theoretical approach will be briefly introduced in the next section, followed by some broader theoretical and methodological considerations. Thereafter, the recent history of Dutch forest policy will be described and analyzed on the basis of this framework. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

2. Theoretical framework: policy arrangement approach

Given the theme of our paper, we need an *institutional* type of policy analysis. This excludes the use of models like policy networks, interpretative policy analysis, normative theory and rational choice approaches (for overviews, see: Abma and In 't Veld, 2001; Marsh and Stoker, 2002; Sabatier, 1999). Two candidates remain as relevant institutional approaches for this paper: the Advocacy Coalition Framework or ACF (Sabatier, 1999) and the Policy Arrangement Approach or PAA (Arts et al., 2006; Arts and Leroy, 2006a; Van Tatenhove et al., 2000). For the following reasons, we selected the latter: (1) whereas the ACF considers 'belief systems' of policy coalitions as the ultimate key factors for explaining stability, change, co-operation and conflict, the PAA takes a broader departure and distinguishes four (interrelated) key variables to understand policy practices: discourses, power, rules and actors; (2) moreover, with the concept of 'discourse', instead of 'belief system', a less individualistic and more dynamic ontology of policy practices is taken as a starting point (compare Hajer, 1995); and (3) with the concept of 'power', the possibility of interest politics is not excluded by the PAA, something Sabatier and his colleagues deliberately did in order to get beyond

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classical political analysis. However, we think that power is not to be neglected in any policy analysis, either classical, post-modern or whatever label is attached to it (Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2004).

A policy arrangement is defined as the way in which a certain policy domain – such as forestry – is shaped in terms of organisation and substance (Wiering and Arts, 2006). When these two aspects are further elaborated upon, the PAA distinguishes four analytical dimensions: ‘discourses’, ‘rules’, ‘actors’ and ‘power’. Actors, power and (some) rules refer to *organisational* aspects, whereas discourses and (various other) rules refer to *substantive* aspects.

A *discourse* is defined as a set of ideas, concepts and narratives which give meaning to a certain phenomenon in the real world (Dryzek, 1997; Hajer, 1995). An example is the sustainability discourse, which brings together notions such as economic, ecological and social sustainability, a belief in the possibility to integrate economy and ecology, examples of win-win situations, etc. This language gives meaning to a world characterized by poverty and ecological degradation, but also to a world which has the potential to become sustainable after all. The next dimension, *rules*, consists of, for example, regulations, legislation and procedures, relevant to a certain policy domain (Giddens, 1984; Ostrom, 1999). These rules demarcate ‘the room to manoeuvre’ for policy actors, e.g. their access to policy arenas, their participation in decision-making, their role in implementation processes, etc. The third dimension, *power*, is elaborated upon in terms of resources and their distribution over policy actors (Clegg, 1989; Giddens, 1984). Resources refer to assets which policy actors can mobilize and on the basis of which they can exercise power over others, e.g. authority, money, knowledge or technology (relational power). Generally, these assets are not equally distributed among policy actors, which lead to a situation in which not all of the actors share similar capacities to achieve outcomes (structural power). Finally, the dimension of *actors* relates to the set of (key) players in a given policy domain. One might think of authorities from different administrative sectors and levels, experts, NGOs, businesses, civilians, etc. Also, the (changing) interaction patterns among these players are taken into account. For example, we might find certain coalitions and/or oppositions (Kickert et al., 1997; Marsh & Rhodes, 1992).

Although distinguished for analytical purposes, the PAA does acknowledge that the four dimensions are inherently interrelated (Liefverink, 2006). For example, one may assume that discursive shifts in a policy domain frequently imply the establishment of new rules of the game, e.g. in terms of the participation of new actors in decision-making. On the following pages, for instance, we will see how the emergence of a multi-functional forest management approach (discourse!) leads to the formal participation (rules!) of new policy actors in forest policy – actors who represent functions other than the traditional productive one.

Within the PAA, de-institutionalisation can be seen as a specific form of institutional change. Major institutional change, it is assumed, can be brought about by factors which are either endogenous or exogenous to the policy arrangement at stake. The former refer to the activities of ‘policy entrepreneurs’ within arrangements. The latter include (a) shock event(s), such as natural disasters or major changes in the arrangement’s political, social or economic environment, (b) the influence of adjacent policy arrangements, e.g. the influence of agricultural policy on nature conservation or forest policy, and (c) the influence of political modernization processes, i.e. the development, over the last two to three decades, of new relationships between state, market and civil society in Western democracies, leading to new types of policy arrangements, often referred to as the shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (see Arts and Leroy, 2006b; Pierre, 2000; Van Tatenhove et al., 2000).

The concept of de-institutionalisation also refers to the more general theory of historical institutionalism. Although historical institutionalism tends to emphasize the stability and path dependency of institutions, it by no means precludes institutional change (March and Olsen, 1989; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). A popular model of institutional change or

even breakdown is that of ‘punctuated equilibrium’. It assumes that, after long periods of institutional stability, relatively rapid institutional change may be prompted by major changes in the external environment (Krasner, 1984). Thelen and Steinmo (1992) stress that the external change need not necessarily take the form of disaster, crisis or revolution. It may also involve a rather piece-meal process of changing ideas and discourses, working within existing institutions but over time forcing those very institutions to transform themselves more radically (e.g. Thelen, 1991; Hall, 1992).

Methodologically, this paper presents itself as a single case study. Guided by the theoretical concepts provided by the PAA, we will conduct a qualitative, in-depth analysis of the historical process of the de-institutionalisation of Dutch forest policy. Validity of the findings, the Achilles’ heel of case study research, is increased by triangulation of data sources (Yin, 1991). For this purpose, three types of sources were consulted: two types of written sources as well as interviews. The written sources included primary sources, i.e. mainly policy documents and legal texts, and secondary literature. The third source of information consisted of 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with policy makers and other actors directly involved in the process. Interviewees were selected by a cumulative method: names were added and checked by the respondents until new names were not mentioned anymore. It was assumed that at that point all key players had been identified. The goal of these interviews was not only to gather additional data, but also to confirm the data obtained from the written sources.

The empirical findings were interpreted along the four dimensions of the PAA. Core ideas and concepts that emerged from the three types of data sources led to the reconstruction of policy discourses. Key actors were identified primarily by tracing formal policy documents. This information was then validated by secondary literature and by asking interviewees to point out the actors that – in their views – had been most important in the policy process. An analysis of shifting resource dependencies formed the basis for the reconstruction of power relations among the key actors. The rules dimension, finally, entails formal and informal rules. Formal rules can relatively easily be derived from written sources. Informal rules were mainly reconstructed on the basis of the interviews.

3. The de-institutionalisation of Dutch forest policy

Until about 20 years ago, the word ‘forestry’ prominently featured in the titles of policy plans and programmes dealing with forests and forestry in the Netherlands. From the mid-1980s, ‘forestry’ was replaced by ‘forest policy’. In what can be considered the latest major policy document in the field, published in 2000, the word ‘forest’ did not even appear on the cover. This semantic change reflects a dramatic shift in the way of thinking about the function and management of forest in the Netherlands. We regard this major discursive change as the heart of the process of de-institutionalisation of Dutch forest policy. Therefore, this section will start in the discourse dimension of the policy arrangement and then go on to discuss resources/power, rules and actors/coalitions, respectively.

3.1. Discourse

The starting point for our analysis is in 1969. The ‘Memorandum on Forestry and Forestry Policy in the Netherlands’ (*Nota bosbouw en bosbouwbeleid in Nederland*, Ministerie van L&V, 1969), published that year, expresses a strong focus on the cultivation of forests for the production of timber. In the interest of safeguarding the supply of domestic timber, the government committed itself to contributing to the cost of reforestation and to working closely together with other stakeholders in the forestry sector, notably private landowners (Zevenbergen, 2002).

In the 'Structural View on Forests and Forestry' (*Structuurvisie op het bos en de bosbouw*, Ministerie van L&V, 1977) of 1977 the production of timber still played a prominent role. Among other things, the document formulated the objective of increasing the domestic supply of timber from below 10 to 25% of the Dutch demand. At the same time, however, other functions of forests were explicitly referred to, such as their contribution to employment and to landscape and recreation values in urban areas (Zevenbergen, 2002).

The 'Multi-year Plan on Forestry' (*Meerjaren Plan Bosbouw*, Ministerie van LNV, 1986), published in 1986, continued on this line of thinking by introducing the notion of multi-functionality. Forests had to fulfill various functions simultaneously, reflecting the interests of different parties. Apart from timber production, those functions were related to recreation, natural values and landscape quality. Multi-functionality implied balancing the various functions of forests on – in principle – equal footing.

In 1993, the 'Multi-year Plan on Forestry' was followed by the 'Forest Policy Plan' (*Bosbeleidsplan*, Ministerie van LNV, 1993). The notion of multi-functionality remained central, but again more emphasis was placed upon nature and sustainability (cf. Wiersum and Van Vliet, 1999). An important background to this was another policy document that had been published three years earlier, the Nature Policy Plan (*Natuurbeleidsplan*, Ministerie van LNV, 1990). One of the key elements of the Nature Policy Plan was the establishment of a so-called National Ecological Network (*Ecologische Hoofdstructuur*, EHS), consisting of a number of core areas and buffer zones, connected by ecological 'corridors'. Almost all forests in the Netherlands were brought under the EHS. In a later stage, many of those were additionally designated as nature areas under the 'Natura 2000' programme of the European Union (EU).

The most recent overall plan in the field of forest policy was the memorandum 'Nature for people, people for nature' (*Natuur voor mensen, mensen voor natuur*, Ministerie van LNV, 2000), issued in 2000. As the title indicates, the plan was primarily about nature. Within this context, one section was devoted to forest policy. The goal of partial self-sufficiency with regard to the production of timber was given up. The plan merely stated that the harvest of timber should be possible. In 'Nature for people, people for nature', no reference to the concept of multifunctionality was made. The focus on nature as the main function of forests had clearly prevailed.

The evolution of Dutch forest policy over the past 40 years is summarised in Table 1. One can distinguish three phases, characterised by a focus on different kinds of forest: from production forest in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, to multi-functional forest from the end of the 1980s up to the mid-1990s, to forest as part of nature from the late 1990s until the present day. This major turn reflects a fundamental shift in the dominant discourse about the role and function of forests in the Netherlands.

Table 1
Evolution of the dominant discourse in Dutch forest policy, exemplified by the main targets and focus of major policy documents in the field from 1969.

Year	Policy document	Main targets	Focus (kind of forest)
1969	Memorandum on forestry and forest policy in the Netherlands	Production of timber	Production forest
1977	Structural view on forests and forestry	Production of timber	Production forest
1986	Multi-year plan on forestry	Production of timber and nature conservation (equally important)	Multifunctional forest
1993	Forest policy plan	Nature conservation more important than the production of timber	Multifunctional forest
2000	Nature for people, people for nature	Nature conservation	Forest as part of nature

The radical re-orientation of Dutch forest policy over the past decades can be linked to a broader shift taking place in Dutch society in roughly the same period, i.e. the rise of post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977).

In the years after the Second World War, the necessity of rebuilding the country had led to a strong focus on economic development and (further) industrialisation. This was enhanced by the rapid growth of the population in the 1950s and 1960s. The oil crises of the 1970s added to a sense of scarcity and economic challenge. The production of timber was strongly advocated in these years by the timber industry and most private forest owners. As will be spelled out in some more detail below, their basically economic arguments held considerable power, whereas the interaction rules prevalent in the arrangement guaranteed their voices to be heard.

Over the years, however, it became increasingly clear that the steady economic growth of this period also had serious negative consequences. In the late 1960 and early 1970s, as in many other Western countries, problems of water and air pollution, among other things, led to the first wave of modern environmental laws and the establishment of an Environment Ministry (see for instance: Liefferink, 1997). At the same time, it was recognised that industrialisation, infrastructure and urban sprawl demanded increasing amounts of space and threatened the last remaining bits of nature in the Netherlands. Ironically, the growing attention among the population for this kind of problems was to a large extent fuelled by the economic expansion that had caused those very problems. With increasing wealth, the quality of life became more and more important. And more specifically, with more money and free time to spend (as well as more private cars to drive out of town!), the demand for 'green' recreational areas significantly increased. As an additional factor in this context, it may be referred to a socio-psychological effect of the particularly rapid pace of urbanisation in the Netherlands. It may be argued that this contributed to a growing estrangement from rural life and agricultural production. As a result, people started to appreciate the natural and esthetical values of rural areas and forests rather than their economic utility. One interviewee reminded the so-called 'slaughter house effect': people want a table made of timber, but they do not want to see trees being cut.

The undercurrent of post-materialism was strongly enhanced by a shock event – or strictly speaking two of them. In 1972 and 1973, two heavy storms hit the Netherlands and heavily damaged the Dutch forests. This not only made the general public acutely aware of the vulnerability of forests, it also triggered a debate on the management of forests among foresters, experts and others directly involved in the issue. The central question was if the serious damage suffered by the forests could be blamed on an 'incompetent' manner of forestry. The sector analyzed the consequences of storms. An important role in the discussion was played by a report on 'natural forest science' (*naturgemasse Waldwissenschaft*) by the Swiss Professor Leibundgut (Leibundgut, 1951). The report propagated a more natural way of forest management, and some 'timber oriented' people supported the method of rejuvenation and using dead wood after visiting Switzerland. Rejuvenation meant that forests did not have to be planted, because an open spot in the forests could also develop itself. Keeping dead pieces of wood would provide a habitat for various plants and insects. The greater biodiversity thus attained was claimed to make the forest not only ecologically more valuable, but also less vulnerable (Buis and Verkaik, 1999).¹ Gradually, the sector started to incorporate

¹ Another 'shock' that hits the forests in this period was the problem of acidification. This was not a shock in the true sense of the word, as the impact of acid deposition on forests is by nature slow and cumulative. Nevertheless, the sudden public and political concern for the issue in the beginning of the 1980s, in the wake of the German upheaval around *Waldsterben* (forest die-back), acted as a shock and drew the attention to the question of the vitality of the Dutch forests. Since the problem was not caused by a particular management or use of the forest, however, but rather by external sources such as industry, cars and agriculture, it did not significantly affect the balance between the advocates of timber production and those favouring the nature function of forests.

the more natural ways of forest management, and experimented with the integration of social, production and natural functions.

At the same time the sector increasingly started to change their forest management, an action group called 'Critical Forest Management' (Landelijke Werkgroep Kritisch Bosbeheer) put natural forest management on the agenda in a more radical way. Their views were going beyond the integration of functions according to the theories of Leibundgut. The group argued that the forest should be managed for nature purpose only, meaning no harvesting of timber. Although the vision of Critical Forest Management was criticised, they created a more heated discussion between 'timber advocates' and 'nature advocates'.

The idea of 'natural forest science' as such remained controversial among experts in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, its emergence signified a shift in thinking, also within the forestry sector, away from production to a more diverse forest. This movement was strongly supported by the upcoming discourse on sustainability. The concept of sustainability had its origins in the Brundtland report 'Our common future' (WCED, 1987) and acquired worldwide attention at the 1992 United Nations Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, where a set of non-binding Forest Principles based on the concept was adopted. Initially, the central concern at the international level was the issue of tropical timber and the sustainable management of tropical rain forests. Thus, in 1992, the Dutch government published its 'Government Position on Tropical Rain Forests' (*Regeringsstandpunt Tropisch Regenwoud*, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 1992). However, one of the messages of the position paper was that, given the Dutch international orientation, sustainability should also be visible in national forest management. Accordingly, 'Integrated Forestry' (*geïntegreerd bosbeheer*) was developed in the Netherlands. This method of forest management has been received enthusiastically, and was widely supported and implemented. 'Integrated Forestry' was inspired by the theories of Leibundgut and represented sustainable forest management. If the Netherlands wanted to be taken seriously about the tropical timber issue in the international context, it was argued, the Dutch also had to manage their own forests according to principles of sustainability. This notion, again emphasising the ecological aspect in Dutch forest management, was first implemented in the Forest Policy Plan of 1993.

Thus both the general rise of post-materialist values among the Dutch population as well as the more specific discussion inside the sector about 'natural' and sustainable forestry pointed to the increasing importance of ecological arguments in the discursive dimension of Dutch forest policy. As we have seen, this was clearly reflected in policy documents from the late 1960s up to the present decade.

More recently, though, the discussion on sustainable forestry seems to have taken a slightly different turn, giving higher priority again to the production function of Dutch forests (Kuipers and Jansen, 2002; PHN/LNV, 2005). In the eyes particularly of the forestry sector, the protection of tropical forests quite logically led to the conclusion that more timber should be provided domestically. In addition, international climate change policy has recently included the option of 'sinks', the sequestration of carbon dioxide in up-growing forests and, hence, timber. This offers the Netherlands another instrument to achieve its Kyoto targets, which seems difficult enough. Forestry can play a role here. Finally, the recent discussion on biofuels – as part of the broader sustainable energy discourse – has given the forestry sector another argument to advocate the indigenous production of wood. All in all, it seems that the marginalized Dutch forestry sector has currently started to regain territory. It is however too early to judge whether this might change the dominant policy discourse and current policy practices.

3.2. Power

The initial power of the forestry sector was based on its economic importance. Forestry has never been one of the major economic sectors in the Netherlands, as for instance in Scandinavia and Finland. Never-

theless, the argument of maintaining a substantive domestic supply of timber had its impact on Dutch forest policy at least until the early 1990s. This argument was based to a large extent on the development of the global timber market.

In the period of reconstruction after the Second World War, the idea of the production of timber as the key function of the Dutch forests was widely accepted. As we have seen, however, it started to be questioned from the 1970s. In those years, international publications by the EU and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), among others, asserted that the worldwide use of timber was increasingly exceeding its production. As a consequence, timber was expected to become scarce. This provided the advocates of a continued emphasis on the production function of Dutch forests with a forceful argument. Stressing a macro-economic perspective, moreover, the timber advocates argued that the scarcity of timber would even further increase because some major export countries, such as Finland, had started to deliver semi-final and final products, notably pulp and paper, rather than the raw material, i.e. timber. This would make the import of timber for the Dutch paper industry even more difficult. In response to this trend – and to the benefit of the national balance of payment and employment – the Netherlands should focus on the domestic production of timber and increasing autarky. Initially, as demonstrated by the 1977 'Structural View on Forests and Forestry' (see above), the argument of the 'timber advocates' was willingly taken up by the policy makers in The Hague.

By the end of the 1980s, however, this macro-economic reasoning started to lose power because some of the underlying assumptions proved to be flawed. First, it turned out that the negative scenarios about the scarcity of timber in the 1980s were not coming true. Timber continued to be available at the international market without sharp price increase. At the national level, forests statistics showed that the Dutch forests grew literally faster than expected. Consequently, there was more timber available in the Netherlands than had been foreseen in the 1970s. Considering the fact that the Dutch forests supplied only 7–8% of the domestic demand, the practical impact of this discovery was limited, but it contributed to undermining the scarcity scenario. Second, EU enlargement with Sweden, Finland and Austria in 1995, coupled with the ongoing development of the EU's Internal Market, led to a more European perspective on timber supply. Particularly Sweden and Finland are major timber producers; their membership of the EU further reduced the need for a substantive Dutch domestic production.

As a result of these developments, the 'timber advocates' lost political significance. A clear indication for this were the subsequent re-organisations within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (*Landbouw Natuurbeheer en Visserij*, see below) and the retreat of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (*Economische Zaken*) from this policy field in the 1990s. This retreat was accompanied by the abolishment of a subsidy on fast-growing trees that had been distributed by the Ministry so far. More generally the set of subsidies that was linked to the policy plans changed: the arrangement of subsidies of the 'Multi-year plan on Forestry' emphasized the production of timber, while the subsidy linked to 'Forest Policy Plan' and 'Nature for People, People for Nature' emphasized nature aspects (Zevenbergen, 2002). Whereas the political and financial resources of the forestry sector continuously decreased, the increase of post-materialist values in Dutch society had laid the basis for massive membership of nature and environment organisations. The largest among them, the Foundation for the Preservation of Natural Monuments (*Vereniging tot Behoud van Natuurmonumenten*) grew from around 200,000 contributing members in 1981 to almost 1 million by the end of the 1990s. The demonstrable public support for the case of nature protection served as a highly significant political resource for the 'nature advocates'. In addition, through the purchase of forest areas, nature organisation had an enlarged ownership that also increased their role in the debate. Nature and environment organisation, moreover, proved considerably more skilled than the traditional forestry sector in communicating

their message to both policy makers and the general public (cf. Van der Meiden, 1999).

A parallel development took place in the expert system and in higher education in forestry. As a case in point, the specialised Forestry Research Institute (*Bosbouwproefstation*) was integrated into the Research Institute for Nature Management (*Rijksinstituut voor Natuurbeheer*). Forestry as an independent curriculum at Wageningen Agricultural University was replaced by a more general curriculum on the management of forests and nature. Thus, specialised expertise – an important resource in almost any policy arrangement – was bound to diminish particularly on the longer term.

As hinted at above, however, the argument of the global timber market was to some extent turned upside-down with the increasing concern about tropical forests. Whereas the absence of an expected global timber scarcity was first taken as an opportunity for further developing the nature function of Dutch forests, it is now increasingly realised that the Netherlands may play its part in tempering the flourishing international timber market's impact on particularly tropical forests by raising its own, allegedly more sustainable production. Climate change comes in here too in view of the important role of tropical rain forests in absorbing carbon dioxide. From a global point of view, in other words, boosting production from Dutch forests might in fact be considered good for the environment.

3.3. Rules

The waning political influence of the traditional forestry sector was not only caused by a shifting societal discourse and diminishing economic and other resources. It also forms part of a more general erosion of neo-corporatist rules of decision-making in the Netherlands.

In the post-War period, Dutch political culture had been dominated by consultation and consensus-building in closed policy arrangements. Elite representatives of interest groups (industry, farmers, etc.) and policy makers worked closely together. In exchange for influence on the content of policies, stakeholders cooperated with the government in the faithful implementation of those policies (Lijphart, 1968). While a style of negotiation and compromise continued to prevail in Dutch politics, neo-corporatist structures started to fall apart from the 1970s (for an early account, see Van Putten 1982). The change was particularly dramatic in the agricultural field, where the originally all-pervading, semi-public organisation of the Agricultural Board (*Landbouwschap*) gradually lost its powers, culminating in its total collapse in the 1990s (cf. Frouws, 1993).

In the forestry sector, neo-corporatism was not as firmly established as in agriculture. There is an equivalent to the Agricultural Board, the Forestry Board (*Boschap*), which consists of representatives of employers and employees in forestry, trade and industry. Its power did not equal that of the Agricultural Board, however, and – maybe for that very reason – it still survives. Nevertheless, the policy process in forest policy used to be as closed as in agricultural policy. The 1969 'Memorandum on Forestry and Forestry Policy in the Netherlands' and the 1977 'Structural View on Forests and Forestry Policy' were prepared entirely behind closed doors, involving only the main responsible ministry, i.e., at the time, the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries (see below), and the forestry sector (Wiersum and Van Vliet, 1999). Moreover, close informal relations existed between forestry and key policy makers, notably Member of Parliament and the Agricultural Ministry's key executive branch in this area, the State Forest Service (*Staatbosbeheer*).

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the rules of the game rapidly changed. The preparations of the 1993 'Forest Policy Plan' and the 2000 'Nature for people, people for nature' report offered several opportunities for actors to influence the policy process. Various ministries were involved and there were influences from international conferences, expert groups and NGOs (Wiersum and Van Vliet, 1999). The issue became more strongly politicised, due to the greater

openness in the policy making process. This implied that also the media started to play a more influential role. Also, the *Boschap* changed from a sectional, neo-corporatist body into a much more open representative organisation, advocating recreational and nature conservation objectives as well (although their old, formal competencies are still intact). In Dutch forestry, in short, neo-corporatist traditions were gradually replaced by more open and participatory rules of governance.

3.4. Actors

The major shift in Dutch forest policy described so far was also reflected in the actors and coalitions involved in the policy arrangement. Most conspicuously, environmental and nature organisations entered the scene and gained increasing influence in the policy area. The action group 'Critical Forest Management' was already mentioned. The more traditional Foundation for the Preservation of Natural Monuments, focusing on the purchase and management of natural areas, not only became a key player in the policy debate due to its large membership (see above), but also as a major forest owner. In addition, other large nature organisations such as WWF became important players in the Dutch forest sector.

Perhaps even more significant are the stepwise changes in the government organisation around forests and forestry. Until the 1980s, the State Forest Service was the first in charge of the policy and management of forests in the Netherlands. The Service had been founded in 1899 and came under the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (*Landbouw en Visserij*). In contrast, the emerging independent policy interest of nature protection was first allocated in the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work (*Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk*). This Ministry was discontinued in 1982 and nature policy was moved to what was now called the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (*Landbouw, Natuurbeheer en Visserij*). For this purpose, it created a new Directorate called 'Nature, Environment and Fauna Management' (*Natuur, Milieu en Faunabeheer*), but most of the policy and management of forests remained in the hands of the State Forest Service. Not only nature protectionists but also foresters were sceptical about this transfer. The latter feared that forest and nature were going to be equalised to the detriment of the forest (Buis and Verkaik, 1999, p. 245).

In 1987, the State Forest Service was split up. While the part dealing with the practical management of forests went on as an independent agency, the former policy and planning branch was transformed into a new Directorate within the Ministry, named 'Forestry and Landscape' (*Bos-en Landschapsbouw*). Only a few years later, the Directorate for Nature, Environment and Fauna Management and the Directorate for Forestry and Landscape were merged together. The new Directorate was called 'Nature, Forestry, Landscape and Fauna' (*Natuur, bosbouw, landschap en fauna*) and was supposed to integrate these four aspects into one view. This significant re-organisation clearly signalled the abolishment of a separate focus on forests. In 1991, the full integration of forests and nature in the Dutch state bureaucracy was confirmed by renaming the Directorate to 'Nature, Environment and Fauna' (*Natuur, Milieu en Fauna*). In addition to that, as mentioned before, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which had so far defended the economic interests of forest owners, terminated its subsidy programme in this field and practically gave up its role in the policy arrangement.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This was a short history of Dutch forest policy. Forests have not physically disappeared from the Netherlands, to be sure. They still cover around 10% of the country and the area is (slowly) expanding. Within a period of about three decades, however, forest policy ceased to exist as an independent policy field. Instead it was integrated into the broader context of nature policy.

In the 1970s the Dutch forests were predominantly used for timber production. This was reflected in the institutional structure of the policy arrangement around forests and forestry. The key actors were the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, mainly represented by the traditional State Forest Service, and the forestry sector, i.e. forest owners, trade and industry. Their main resource in the political arena was the basically economic argument of maintaining the largest possible self-sufficiency in timber production in a world market characterised by uncertainty and looming scarcity. The neo-corporatist rules of closed decision-making made it possible to effectively exclude other interests.

Around the year 2000, this situation had radically changed. Various other actors had entered the policy field, notably environmental and nature organisations. This was facilitated by the overall relaxation of neo-corporatist rules in the Netherlands. At the same time, the main stronghold of the forestry sector in The Hague, the Agricultural Ministry, had incorporated nature management as one of its main fields of activity. Significantly, its name had changed into 'Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries'. Internally, the independent unit for forestry had been dissolved. The economic argument of partial timber autarky was hardly taken serious anymore, based among other things on the perception that more open European and global markets guaranteed a higher security of supply. Instead, public and political pressure for protecting nature and providing 'green' recreational areas for the urban population² increased immensely, symbolized among other things by the now massive membership of organisations for nature conservation. It should be added, though, that currently environmental issues such as climate change and the protection of tropical forests seem to induce a cautious revival of the production function of forests. However, this development has not had any institutional impact so far.

In this paper, we argued that a discursive shift lies at the heart of the rapid de-institutionalisation of Dutch forest policy. As key factors were identified: the general rise of post-materialist values in the Netherlands, the two heavy storms in the 1970s, defined here as 'shock events', and the development of the concept of sustainable forestry. They led to a debate not only about how to manage the forest most effectively in response to these developments, but also to the more fundamental question of the function of forests in a wealthy, highly industrialized and urbanized country such as the Netherlands. The outcome of this debate, as we have seen, was very much in favour of the proponents of 'forest as part of nature'.

In theoretical terms, what is remarkable in this story is the radical but nevertheless gradual character of this process of de-institutionalisation. Some major changes in the context of forest policy (amongst others post-materialism, environmental shock events, sustainable development discourse) led to a process of gradual, but eventually far-reaching institutional transformation. As such, the process reminds one of Peter Hall's famous account of the way in which upcoming monetarist ideas in Britain in the early 1970s were helped by the 'shock' of Margaret Thatcher's election to accomplish a shift away from then pre-dominant Keynesian conceptions of economic policy (Hall, 1992). Contrary to the thesis of 'punctuated equilibrium' (cf. Krasner, 1984), the case of Dutch forest policy confirms that radical institutional change, even up to the point of full de-institutionalisation, does not necessarily take place in an atmosphere of crisis, but may also come about slowly and gradually (cf. Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). Even then, however, the almost full 'evaporation' of a policy field is quite remarkable. It can only be explained by considering the exact nature of the institutional change in more detail. For this purpose, the PAA turned out very helpful. It showed that in the case of Dutch forest policy the dynamic in all four dimensions of the policy arrangement – discourse (where, arguably, the shift was rooted),

power, rules and actors – pointed in the same direction. Thus, all trends worked to the same result: the almost complete de-institutionalisation of forest policy in the Netherlands.

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² Obviously, the policy goals of nature protection and recreation may in themselves lead to contradictory claims on land, but that is not the subject of the present paper.

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