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Developments in Dutch Environmental Policy: Target Rationality or Cultural Shift?

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1. Introduction

Present Dutch environmental policy holds a somewhat unique position in the world. This is due not so much to its results, although those are also regarded in a positive way. Rather, it is due to its approach, the way in which the policy was realized and is being implemented. Often the Dutch National Environmental Policy Plans and the way these are implemented through national target group consultations, covenants, the activation of various intermediary organizations and the stimulation of self-regulation (such as the OECD, 1995), are regarded with envy as well as – sometimes – disbelief. Many of these things are also wholly or partly seen in other countries, but nowhere else does this approach exist so fully and so dominantly compared to other policy strategies. In fact, this policy approach was not followed from the very beginning of Dutch environmental policy, but implies a major shift away from the environmental policies of the seventies (Bressers, 1991).

The central issue that we will discuss in this article thus reads: “Why is it that Dutch environmental policy began making use of organized consultation and ‘self-regulation within frameworks’ to such a large extent?”

This question can be approached from several angles. In this article we shall try to answer it from a specific perspective: i.e. that of ‘cultural theory’ (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990; Schwarz & Thompson, 1990). This yields a perspective on developments in Dutch environmental policy that is contrasted with a view of developments as a consequence of a rational learning process on the basis of new experiences and circumstances. Here we will focus on environmental policy in the narrower sense, namely the policy followed by the General Directorate of Environmental Policy and its forerunners.

The next paragraph begins with a brief outline of developments in Dutch environmental policy. This is followed by a very concise explanation, in paragraph 3, of some aspects of cultural theory. Paragraph 4 places developments in environmental policy in the perspective of this approach. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in paragraph 5.

2. Changes in Environmental Policy

In this paragraph we very briefly outline the initial design and changes in Dutch environmental policy as a series of self-evident responses to new insights and circumstances. This outline serves as a background for their interpretation, using some concepts from cultural theory, in paragraph four. This results in a picture that is intentionally somewhat one-sided in nature.

The seventies: construction of the legal framework

Already in the seventies, Holland liked to see itself as a 'pioneering country' in the field of environmental policy. However, this referred to the speed with which legislation was passed and the strictness of policy-makers' intentions rather than to the special nature of the policy approach. This approach may be characterized as a relatively conventional one, not much different from what was being done in many other countries in the same period. When various environmental problems had been recognized by politicians and a first wave of public attention arose for the environment, the construction of a legal framework was begun. This resulted, in the course of the seventies, in a series of laws dealing with the various sectors of the natural environment, such as water and air, and making pollution of the environmental sector in question with waste materials subject to licensing. Around 1980 this stage of policy making was more or less completed. At the same time, however, the first developments began to be seen which were to lead to considerable changes in the policy approach.

The eighties: evaluation and adjustment followed by rapid development

Early policy evaluations of the impact of the new environmental acts (e.g. Twijnstra Gudde, 1981; for a survey see Bressers and Coenen, 1989) showed the following: the application and enforcement of the licensing systems showed serious deficiencies. Licensing procedures took a long time – perhaps too long – to be processed. Adjustment problems, having to do both with content and procedure, arose between the various types of sectoral legislation.

Various measures were taken in response to these new insights in the course of the eighties:

- ❖ The licensing obligation was limited by the gradual introduction of systems of general regulations for many branches of industry. The end result of this will be that the vast majority of firms will no longer require individual environmental licenses. This reduces the procedural burden on the government and on businesses.
 - ❖ The capacity to implement environmental acts was increased. First this was done mainly through the stimulation of a planned approach to policy implementation by means of subsidies (Noise Pollution Act and environmental implementation programs). Later on, more extensive financial stimuli were also applied to policy implementation, combined with the obligation imposed on municipalities to cooperate in implementing the environmental tasks. This led to a considerable increase in the number of environmental officials.
 - ❖ An 'umbrella law' was introduced, the General Environmental Hygiene Regulations Act, which coordinated the procedural aspects of the various sectoral laws and provided additional opportunities for in-depth coordination, such as 'Environmental Impact Reporting'.
- Furthermore, policy memoranda on environmental policy were increasingly formulated in terms of 'environmental issues', i.e. environmental problems exceeding the boundaries of the various sectors. Eventually, the Environmental Control Act was passed which regulated the licensing systems of most sectoral laws.

More than a hundred policy evaluation studies were performed in the field of Dutch environmental policy (Schuddeboom, 1994). There is almost no other area in which the

authorities so expressly tried to make it possible to learn from experience in policy-making. However, the new evaluation studies also showed that in the course of the eighties the impact of these policies did not quite live up to expectations. Moreover, new environmental problems kept appearing on the agenda, particularly in the second half of the eighties.

The acceptance in the Netherlands of the principle of 'sustainable development' from the Brundtland report (1987) and its rapid application to the Dutch situation by the State Institute of Public Health and Environmental Hygiene (RIVM, 1988) subsequently made redefinition of environmental policy as a matter of (inter)national priority inevitable. In response to these reports, the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NMP) was drawn up, which did not just redefine the policy view of the environmental problem, but also set new and more ambitious targets. This national plan, which was unanimously accepted in Parliament, was much admired abroad. Nevertheless it was criticized at the national level. In addition to the remarks made by the environmental movement, which called for even more radical targets, this criticism focused on the fact that in view of the still disappointing results of the licensing system, insufficient thought had yet been given within the National Environmental Policy Plan to the way in which these ambitious targets might be achieved. After all, not only did the evaluation studies show that the effectiveness of environmental policy had its limitations, but also gradually a more general picture emerged that the government could influence developments in society only to a limited extent, let alone steer these developments. In retrospect we can see this moment as a breaking point in the development of the policy strategy of Dutch environmental policy. With its greatly intensified objective and a new awareness of the limited possibilities offered by the current policy approach, environmental policy, at the height of its public support, was urgently in need of a revision.

The nineties: a 'new deal'

It was for this reason that the 'NMP+' (National Environmental Policy Plan Plus) emphasized the changes that were needed in policy strategy. The NMP+ pays a lot of attention to the partners that are necessary to realize these goals. A special Appendix on policy instruments, among other things, announced new directions in policy strategy, which were intended to supplement the existing emphasis on licensing and other forms of direct regulation. One of these strategies was to try to induce the target groups to take more responsibility themselves for a clean environment.

This was elaborated in the Dutch target group policy. The objectives of the NMP+ were taken as a starting point for consultations with representatives of, by now, nearly all the main branches of industry. When an agreement is reached on the contribution that the branch in question has to make to achievement of the objectives, this agreement is usually recorded in a covenant. These covenants are not just intended to directly influence the behaviour of the firms, but also to serve as a guideline for licensing at a later stage. Also the subsidizing of new environmental technologies and other policy instruments takes place increasingly in the context of target group policies. It is no exaggeration to say that target group policies have come to dominate the environmental policy agenda where this is focused on business and industry.

The results of these policies seem encouraging up to now insofar as they deal with technical adaptations of production processes (RIVM, 1995). It is true that there are several

fields where target achievement is not 'on course' toward the NMP objective. But this does partly involve the environmental behaviour of 'hard-to-reach target groups', which makes organized consultation more difficult to accomplish and yield results (NMP 2, 1993, p. 11), and environmental problems for which technical adaptations are difficult to apply (such as CO² emissions).

Besides, strong economic growth leads to a rapid increase in the environmental burden (RIVM, 1996).

Sensible choices or fortunate coincidence?

This concludes our presentation of some developments that have taken place in Dutch environmental policy. Above we have consistently presented these developments as rational responses to new insights and circumstances. The perception of the environmental problem gave rise to a policy that corresponded to that of our neighbouring countries. Evaluation studies led to attempts to remove the problem areas that were found. New insights into the environmental problem resulted in redefinition. Recognition of the limitations of the existing instrumentarium yielded a new approach. This picture is not only outlined above, but this is also how successive policy-makers have defined their policy actions.

But is the argument that is presented here really correct? Are all these developments really only the result of considered choices? Some doubts arise if we look not only at what has in fact been done, but also at what might have been done but has not in fact been accomplished.

Firstly, together with the development of environmental policy as a complex of, chiefly, licensing systems in the seventies, very different approaches were chosen by other Ministries in other policy fields. Thus, energy conservation was encouraged by the Ministry of Economic Affairs through enlightenment and subsidies (Van der Doelen, 1989), water pollution was combated by the Water Boards and the Ministry of Traffic and Waterways by means of government facilities and charges (Bressers, Huitema & Kuks, 1995), and after it had long made refused to take the problem seriously, the Ministry of Agriculture, Conservation and Fisheries tackled agricultural pollution, using the great variety of instruments that is also typical of general agricultural policy (Termeer, 1993). Briefly put: the choice of licensing systems as a means to combat pollution by firms in particular, was common practice if we look at what was done abroad, but it was not completely self-evident.

Secondly, already in the early eighties, under the Ministry of Winsemius, the first attempts were seen to get in touch with the target groups. Direct individual contacts served to mitigate any hostile thinking in the individual Ministries, making the Ministries' own policies less dependent on the involvement of other Ministries. This appeared to have been inspired by general ideas on good management rather than being a response to the inadequacy of other policy instruments. In those days there was not yet any question of a 'crisis mood' concerning the environment. Even before the National Environmental Policy Plan (NMP) was passed, the then Minister Nijpels concluded several covenants (Klok, 1989). Such developments did not take place, or to a far lesser extent, e.g. in Germany (viz. Weidner, 1996). Briefly put: already preceding the 'bankruptcy' of the old approach, a great deal of preparation went into the approach which was to bear fruit only in the nineties.

Thirdly, when Alders, the Minister under whose leadership the new policy approach really took shape, was appointed, he still stated that no new covenants would be concluded during his term of government. One year later the NMP announced not one, but two new directions that were intended to supplement policy strategy. In addition to the emphasis on cooperation with partners, at least as much attention was given to the need to develop a system of financial stimuli. However, little came of this in practice. Alders even declared that in retrospect he felt that his efforts on behalf of a CO² charge, which did not make it, was ‘his greatest mistake as a Minister’, because he gave those who opposed environmental policy the chance to regroup and join forces, and because the proposal cost a disproportional amount of energy on the part of himself and his Ministry (oral information, 1996). In brief: the choice of the ‘consultation strategy’ was certainly not an undisputed one, or free of competition by other new innovative ideas. Why this addition did bear fruit while the others did not, cannot be understood from the perspective of the intentions of the politician in question.

On reflection we find, therefore, that the changes in direction of this policy partly anticipate, partly lag behind the developments to which they appear to be a logical response. Apparently, other forces were at work – at least partly – than purely rational responses to the above-mentioned insights and changing circumstances to which they appeared to correspond so beautifully, at any rate from a distance. In a previous article, one of these authors already examined these developments from the perspective of the relationship between government and target groups in the policy network (Bressers, 1993). Here we will look at them from the point of view of cultural theory.

3. Cultural theory

A separate perspective on the development of policy is provided by the so-called ‘cultural theory’ (Thompson et al., 1990; Schwarz & Thompson, 1990). Cultural theory is based on the concept that values (cultural bias) and patterns of social relations interact and form combinations that may or may not be viable. The patterns of social relations were taken from Mary Douglas, and can be characterized by means of two dimensions: ‘grid’ and ‘group’. ‘Grid’ refers to the extent to which the life of an individual is bound by externally imposed obligations. ‘Group’ refers to the extent to which an individual feels that he/she is incorporated into a specific whole. In the extreme case a person does not perceive himself as an individual, but solely as a group member. These two dimensions together form four quadrants. The combination of strong obligations and a strong group feeling corresponds to a hierarchic culture. The combination of weak obligations and a strong group feeling corresponds to an egalitarian culture. An individualistic culture is characterized by weak obligations and a weak group feeling. Strong obligations in combination with a weak group feeling yield a fatalistic culture. The above-mentioned relations between patterns and cultures are instantly recognizable, and also seem plausible at first sight. However, these concepts are very abstract ones, which leave a great deal of room for interpretation. This means that their application to concrete situations of necessity also remains a matter of interpretation; at any rate, many intermediate steps are needed for their application or choices for their operationalization (viz. Hoppe and Peterse, 1993). Within the limited space of this article we will be unable to discuss the lat-

ter. However, in the second half of this paragraph we will describe the above-mentioned cultures in more detail before applying them to developments in Dutch environmental policy.

According to Thompson c.s., each of these four patterns also involves a certain view of the basis of culture, i.e. nature. As a matter of fact, these relations seem less convincing and obvious to us than the relations between the patterns and cultures described above. Nevertheless, in this 'exercise' we will assume the use of cultural theory as a perspective to interpret developments in Dutch environmental policy. According to Thompson c.s., the individualist will see nature as abundant ('benign'): an abundance to be utilized. To the fatalist, nature will seem unpredictable ('capricious'). The hierarchist sees nature as having a certain limited capacity to absorb pollution ('perverse/tolerant'). The egalitarian, finally, sees nature as vulnerable and transitory ('ephemeral'). Figure 1 (source: Schwarz & Thompson, 1990, p. 9) summarizes the above.

(Figure 1)

Figure 1, Four cultural rationalities and their view of nature

A 'cultural' perspective on the development of Dutch environmental policy begins with a description of viewpoints with regard to the environmental problem that can be expected in the basis of cultural theory. Naturally, this primarily concerns views of the environment and environmental policy, which correspond to the subcultures distinguished by the theory. Here, as in the rest of our analysis, we will restrict ourselves to the three 'active subcultures' (Thompson et al., 1990, p. 88): individualism, hierarchy and egalitarianism. The fatalist will see environmental problems as things that happen to him and that he himself can hardly change at all.

The way in which the individualist looks at environmental problems is determined by two central elements: the concept of benign nature and the importance of interfering as little as possible with free-enterprise production and the market. The concept of abundant nature implies on the one hand that nature has a great capacity for self-restoration; because of this an unbalanced situation, in terms of e.g. the emission of certain substances, will always be temporary, because nature itself restores equilibrium. On the other hand, this concept implies that drastic disturbance of the natural equilibrium will automatically create a competitive edge for those who are able to cope with such a disturbance. The risks that are involved in environmental problems are not really a problem, therefore, but rather a challenge that creates opportunities for new markets (Thompson et al., 1990, p. 63). Likewise, any depletion of certain natural resources will only lead to the development or exploitation of other resources. From this point of view the forceful interference with market processes is not only 'superfluous' but even harmful, because it obstructs the 'natural' development of alternatives. If an environmental policy is to be followed at all, at any rate it should be of a voluntary nature (weak obligations – 'grid') and be based on the sovereignty of consumers and producers (weak group feeling – 'group').

Diametrically opposed to the viewpoint of the individualist is that of the egalitarian. If nature is seen as vulnerable, if not transitory, any disturbance of the natural equilibrium soon implies the threat of total catastrophe. So disturbance of this equilibrium should be prevented as much as possible. If such a disturbance does occur, drastic measures should

be taken as quickly as possible, because the further one is removed from the equilibrium, the more difficult it becomes to restore it. Since the environmental risks are life-threatening, the principle of 'sustainability' should be a guiding one for the organization of society. Consumer demand should be adjusted to the possibilities offered by the natural environment (Thompson et al., 1990, p. 44). Such an approach is contrary to the present organization of economic processes, where the focus is on growth, not just to satisfy existing demand, but also to create and satisfy new demand. Thus free-market principles do not offer any solution to the problem; rather they are the cause of it.

It is difficult to determine the most desirable policy option from this perspective. In the long run a radical reform of society is necessary, where the strengthening of group ties enables people to live at a more moderate level of consumer demand. In such a situation environmental policy will really become superfluous. In the short run, though, as long as large sections of society show an insufficient sense of responsibility, it is necessary not to disturb the balance too much, which would justify a strong interference (with strong obligations – 'high grid') with environmentally threatening economic processes. Thus, here short-term policy preferences deviate from individual ideals regarding the way in which society is coordinated, which would make a temporary alliance with the hierarchists an obvious choice (viz. Thompson et al., 1990, p. 89).

The position that is taken from the subculture of the hierarchy with regard to the environmental problem, can in a sense be located between two other positions. The view that nature is able to tolerate a certain level of pollution contains a trajectory that involves a stable equilibrium and, close to its boundaries, a trajectory where an unstable equilibrium is seen. Such a viewpoint is easy to combine, particularly if one is on the stable trajectory, with a free market economy where producers and consumers can do whatever they like to a certain extent. As the unstable trajectory approaches, however, it becomes more necessary to interfere drastically in order not to drift into a situation comparable with that of 'ephemeral, transitory' nature. This philosophy attaches a great deal of importance to the input of experts in order to determine at what point of the trajectory a society is located and to draw the boundaries of environmental pollution which should be guaranteed by means of strict measures ('high grid'). Here compliance with such obligations, which as a rule also make a moral appeal to citizens and firms, is seen as a civic duty ('high group'). Cultural theory assumes that in each society the aforesaid four cultural patterns are represented. The extent to which this is the case can vary, however. Some societies will have a higher percentage of people and groups with an individualistic attitude than others. Shifts may also occur over time (Thompson et al., pp. 75-81). Such shifts can also occur because the actions of people within a certain category (e.g. hierarchists) can frustrate others (and impel them towards the fatalists, for instance). Another source of change can be 'surprises': the realization that the world (nature) is organized differently than one had thought (Thompson et al., 1990, pp. 71-74).

4. A 'cultural' perspective on the development of Dutch environmental policy

According to theory, the environmental policy that can be expected in a country during a certain period, is a resultant of the extent to which the various subcultures are supported by actors and the way in which they, e.g. through the formation of coalitions and the

taking of initiatives, influenced the realization of the policy (Thompson et al., 1990, pp. 86-93). Looking at the positions of various groups of actors during the realization of the first generation of Dutch environmental policies, also in those cases the position of these groups can often be understood as a result of a coalition of various subcultures. Nevertheless, the various subcultures may be present more clearly in one group of actors than in the other group.

As such, in the political context of the realization of environmental policy, business and industry can be seen as representing the individual subculture. During this period firms showed a tendency to recognize environmental problems to only a limited extent. Insofar as these problems could be clearly demonstrated, it was strongly felt that technical adaptations of production processes would be able to solve these problems. The egalitarian subculture was found mainly within part of the environmental movement. 'Alternative', left-wing social structures based on equality and life at a moderate level of consumer demand and supply constituted a large part of this philosophy.

During the seventies, the main role within the government was allotted to the Directorate General of 'Environmental Hygiene' (DGMH), which was set up mainly to deal with environmental problems. During this period the attitude of this Directorate within the political context of the realization of environmental policy was dominated by viewpoints which could be called hierarchic. These views were rooted mainly in the progressive ideas of the sixties and seventies about the leading role the government would have to play in shaping society. Because this was a new organization, at that moment no clear historically developed relations existed at that moment with individualistic groups in society. Persons within this organization with more egalitarian views could not reasonably assume that their opinions would be shared by the target groups of the policy, i.e. the firms. Seen from this constellation of opinions and relations it is understandable that the DMGH made an effort mainly on behalf of an environmental policy with a hierarchic character.

In the remainder of this paragraph we shall limit ourselves, for the sake of brevity, to the main development that occurred in the policy of the General Directorate for Environmental Control: the shift away from regulations that stipulate the behaviour of the firms as much as possible to objectives that had to be pursued by the firms themselves and were often in fact realized in consultation between the government and representatives of groups of firms. In fact, we intentionally will not discuss developments in relations between the various government actors and the interests they represent, such as those that emerged e.g. in decision-making about major infrastructural projects.

Above we have characterized the policy that was initially followed in terms of cultural theory as being mainly 'hierarchic'. A high level of 'grid' was involved (indicated by the frequent use of legal steering instruments which contain details of obligations), while in addition group ties were used to a limited extent. Both in the realization of regulations and in their application in the form of licensing, the firms or the organizations that represented them were regularly consulted. The shift towards a more consensus-oriented approach was accompanied by a decrease in the use of detail regulations and an increase in the use of standards agreed upon as a group (branches plus government). This development can be characterized, in terms of theory, as a reduction of grid, while at the same time standards with a group character were strengthened.

Some comments are in place here. We do not see a reduction of the number of legal rules so much as a change in their content. Moreover, now more than previously their realization is a subject of negotiation between policy-makers and target groups within the various branches of industry. Of course, negotiations may be quite suited to an individualistic, 'free-market' oriented culture. However, these negotiations in target group policy differ from most other negotiations in the market sector in the sense that the focus is not on the exchange between the offering of and paying for products, but on achieving a joint course of action. In that sense they are comparable to negotiations between firms that are considering some form of cooperation rather than to 'bargaining' in the marketplace. In a number of cases, covenants are even used to organize the branch as a group or strengthen this organization.

Moreover, in many cases (in covenants) the results of such negotiations are not recorded in the form of legal rules but contain agreements that have to be controlled primarily by the target groups themselves. For branch organizations, target group negotiation and monitoring whether the covenants are observed, enable them to enhance group standardization within the branch (and the individual positions).

This does not mean that the grid-like character completely disappears. Ideally, the group norms are subsequently reincorporated into licenses (to guarantee their legal status) and when the agreements are realized, the possibility to resort to 'old-fashioned' regulation, if necessary, frequently serves as a 'goad' to induce target groups to approve agreements that they would not support sufficiently without such a goad. In other words, we do see a 'certain' but definitely not a 'full' reduction of grid and strengthening of group.

The explanation of such changes is in theory mainly sought in a change of the number of actors that is found within the various subcultures and the nature of the alliances based on this. The subcultures themselves are stable, according to that opinion, i.e. their character does not 'shift'. Only persons change and thus drift from one consistent subculture into the other. Only if this happens to a sufficient extent can another culture or alliance of culture gain dominance.

With such a strict interpretation of theory, the above-described development in the Netherlands seems difficult to explain. Within the various relevant groups some shift in orientation can be found, it is true, but it is too seldom that people or organizations undergo a complete change in perspective. Thus over the years, industry has begun to pay more attention to the problematic and risky aspects of the environmental problem. Authoritative publications by research institutes such as the State Institute for War Documentation (RIVM) in the Netherlands, and pictures that can be viewed by everyone, such as the satellite images of the 'hole in the ozone layer' contributed to this. However, there is no question of a substantial shift of (people in) firms towards a unilateral egalitarian or hierarchic orientation as described by the theory. At most, there is a basically individualistic orientation where a certain extent of group and grid are accepted. Such a development may be seen both as partial confirmation and partial falsification of the theory; confirmation to the extent that it becomes obvious that firms that are 'caught' in the context of the market mechanism are not really capable of 'escaping' from the individualistic perspective. However, this contradicts the theory that within an orientation a considerable change does occur in the direction of the other subcultures.

In the other groups of actors, a comparable development may be seen from the core of their orientation. This is most clearly seen with the representatives of the Ministry and the

politicians responsible for environmental policy. Particularly under the responsibility of Minister Winsemius a 'cultural reversal' took place in which civil servants learned to think not only from the perspective of environmental problems, but also seriously tried to identify with the problems faced by the firms. Consultation with firms and 'interiorization' of environmental awareness thus became cornerstones of the new policy style. Initially many people feared that this would result only in a weakening of the objectives of environmental policy, but there was little evidence of this. On the contrary: nowhere were the far-reaching consequences for the objectives of the policy realized more quickly than precisely in the Netherlands. So also here we do see a change in orientation, but the central issue remains that the limits imposed on economic action by the environment have to be set by government actors as advised by experts, after which it can be discussed how these objectives can be realized in mutual collaboration.

The basic concept of hierarchic orientation continued to occupy an important position, even during a period that government policy as a whole showed a shift that may be characterized as a partial adaptation to an 'individualistic' orientation.

A shift also occurred in a large segment of the environmental groups. Although these groups largely had an egalitarian orientation, in the short term (within the political context of policy-making) still a hierarchic policy was supported. In view of the impossibility of accomplishing any rapid changes in the organization of the economy, it was probably best to control the environmental problems by means of strict legislation. The joint choice made by business and industry and by the Ministry in favour of a less hierarchic approach was initially regarded with some suspicion, therefore. However, when it appeared rather quickly that in both groups (albeit to a different extent) a change occurred which had to do with 'sincere' care for the environment, the environmental movement was also prepared to take part in the negotiations. Eventually, a reduction of grid and a strengthening of group standards also became acceptable to a considerable section of the environmental movement. This did mean that the game had to be played along with the other actors and the environmental movement had to act as a reliable negotiating partner. For another section of this movement, this amounted to 'being in league with the enemy', which sometimes gave rise to mutual tension. Even more than in the case of business and government actors, the environmental movement appears to show the tensions that are likely to arise, according to theory, if a person moves away from the core of his or her own subculture. If we see the policy that is followed over a certain period of time as the resultant of a compromise between what may be expected on the basis of the orientations of the various coalitions, the more consensus-oriented policy style in environmental policy and accompanying shift in content and nature of the standards seems understandable from the perspective of the shifts in orientation of the various groups involved in environmental policy. Although of course the shifts of these groups cannot simply be 'added up' as some kind of vectors, it is easy to see that on balance the result will be a reduction of grid (mainly due to changes in government actors and environmental movement) and a strengthening of group (mainly due to changes in business and government actors). Compared to other countries, where a more open attitude on the part of business and industry was sometimes also seen, but where such a change in policy style was at any rate much less noticeable, particularly the changes in orientation among government actors in environmental policy (orientation on cooperation with business and industry without losing sight of environmental interests) and among environmental groups (looking for results

through cooperation, with the risk of getting one's hands too dirty) can be called remarkable. Without such a change we cannot expect too many changes to occur among the representatives of business and industry. Here the presence of well-functioning branch organizations is an important condition as well.

5. Conclusion

In this article we have discussed developments in Dutch environmental policy from a certain 'rational' and a certain 'cultural' perspective. Both perspectives appear to be satisfactory only to a certain degree. The interpretation of the development of policy as a consequence of a learning process leaves important questions unanswered. The changes towards a consensual approach and standards that are based more on group ties can only be understood on the basis of cultural theory if a shift in orientation within the various subcultures is assumed. This is contrary to theory, however. After all, according to theory such situations are not 'viable'.

It is remarkable, though, that in all groups that were involved in this outline of the development of environmental policy, a shift was seen away from the core of the orientation towards a less clear-cut orientation. Seen from the central concept of the theory that society should be seen as a coherent whole, this could lead to the hypothesis that changes away from the core of the orientations may be possible (viable), provided these changes take place in a comparable way within all subcultures. Societies could then vary the extent to which the various subcultures (that are always present) have a clear-cut character. It seems interesting to subject such a hypothesis to further investigation.