



Environment & Society



White Horse Press

Full citation:

van der Heijden, Hein-Anton. "Ecological Restoration, Environmentalism and the Dutch Politics of 'New Nature.'"

*Environmental Values* 14, no. 4, (2005): 427-446.

<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/5947>

Rights:

All rights reserved. © The White Horse Press 2005. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism or review, no part of this article may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, including photocopying or recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission from the publisher. For further information please see <http://www.whpress.co.uk/>

# Ecological Restoration, Environmentalism and the Dutch Politics of 'New Nature'

HEIN-ANTON VAN DER HEIJDEN

*University of Amsterdam  
Department of Political Science  
OZ Achterburgwal 237, 1012 DL Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Email: H.A.B.vanderHeijden@uva.nl*

## ABSTRACT

'New nature' refers to the current practice in which ten thousands of hectares of superfluous agricultural lands are 'given back to nature', compensating for the loss of 'old nature' in other parts of the Netherlands. Around the issue of 'new nature' two discourses have emerged. In each discourse different environmental values are emphasised: about what nature is or could be; about the relationship between nature, agriculture and development; about ecological mitigation, and so on. Whereas the Dutch branch of WWF is the most active promoter of the sectorial nature development discourse, environmental groups like Friends of the Earth try to weigh these sectorial interests against the background of increasing environmental degradation.

## KEYWORDS

Environmentalism, nature development, ecological restoration, WWF

During the twentieth century, the percentage of earth covered by tropical rainforests has declined from 15 to 2 per cent. During the same century, in the United States and in Western Europe, the tens of millions of hectares of forests that once covered these continents have been cut down and turned into agricultural lands. Simultaneously, however, partly as a result of conservation movement pressure, large parts of the remaining wild land on both sides of the Atlantic have been changed into nature reserves and national parks.<sup>1</sup>

During the last twenty years, in some countries, notably in the Netherlands, a completely new form of nature politics has emerged. Rather than conserving existing nature, this politics of nature aims at what appears to be a contradiction: developing nature, that is, creating new nature. Whereas nature development

originally referred to the development of nature into productive agricultural land, nowadays the concept has a new, completely opposite meaning. Large parts of the Dutch countryside, adding up to a quarter of a million hectares, are 'given back to nature', partly compensating for the ongoing loss of nature in other parts of the country. Agricultural lands are flooded, dikes cut, aurochs reintroduced.

The portion of civil society most involved in the politics of new nature is the environmental movement. These politics, however, have burdened the movement with a series of dilemmas. For instance, what should be the relationship between nature development and the conservation of (agri-)cultural landscapes? How should nature development be assessed when it is used as a concession for the loss of nature in other parts of the country? At a more basic level, nature development confronts the movement with identity-connected questions like what kind of nature it really wants, what nature is or could be, and how the relationship between nature, development and politics should be conceived of.

The question I want to answer in this article is how the different parts of the Dutch environmental movement have dealt with the topic of new nature, which environmental values they have emphasised and which ones have been played down.

Nature development in the Netherlands could be seen as a distinct form of 'ecological restoration'. In order to assess the Dutch practice of nature development it makes sense to compare it with the problem definitions, solution strategies and dilemmas of ecological restoration as presented in the literature. So, to begin, I will give a concise review of this literature (section 1). In the second section, an overview of the politics of new nature in the Netherlands will be presented, and, in the third section, the different positions of environmental groups with respect to new nature will be analysed. Finally the research question will be answered.

## ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Ecological restoration refers to the practice of making damaged ecosystems whole again by arresting invasive and weedy species, reintroducing missing plants and animals to create an instant web of life, understanding the changing historical conditions that led to present conditions, creating or rebuilding soils, eliminating hazardous substances, ripping up roads, and returning natural processes such as fire and flooding to places that thrive on those regular pulses (Higgs, 2003: 1).<sup>2</sup> Ecological restoration is different from preservation and conservation and, in some circumstances, even has to compete with them.

The history of ecological restoration in the United States goes back as far as the 1930s, but its real popularity dates from the second half of the 1980s. In 1987 the Society for Ecological Restoration was founded, the lead international

## 'NEW NATURE'

organisation with, at present, members from more than thirty different countries. Restoration, as Higgs puts it, seems to be coming to serve as a new metaphor for our relations with natural things: 'we are in a restorative, as opposed to, say, a conservationist mode' (Higgs, 2003: 11).

At present thousands of restoration projects take place every year, not only in the United States but also in Europe. They vary from removing invasive or planted species, and changing nutrient or water levels in soils ('habitat rehabilitation'), to putting in place totally new assemblages of species and ecosystems ('habitat creation') (Adams, 1996: 125–6). A very popular kind of ecological restoration is river restoration, the redesign and reconstruction of the physical form of a river such that natural processes of erosion and deposition can begin themselves to recreate aquatic and riparian habitats, and the wildlife and landscape that goes with them (Adams, 1996: 165–6). As ecological restoration basically is about assisted recovery, restorationists work to accelerate natural processes by creating conditions that might take years, decades, or centuries to occur without intervention. But recovery processes are also directed toward specific ends determined by the restorationist. These ends, or goals, are based on a host of factors, principally ecological, but also economic, social, cultural, political, and moral (Higgs, 2003: 110).

Ecological restoration in Europe has been practised in, for instance, Britain (Eden, Tunstall and Tapsell, 2000), Hungary (Lipschutz, 1996, ch. 5), Slovakia (Seffer and Stanova, 1999), Germany (Kern, 1992), and in many other countries.

Ecological restoration has been discussed thoroughly in the literature (Adams, 1996; Birch, 1990; Eliot, 1982, 1997; Higgs, 2003; Katz, 1992; Light, 2000; Light and Higgs, 1996). From this literature at least three criticisms of ecological restoration emerge: the debate on the relationship between restoration and conservation; the debate about naturalness and the possibility of restoring it at all; and, finally, the debate on ecological mitigation.

The first criticism of ecological restoration contends that ecological restoration will dilute our efforts at preservation and conservation, and lead to an ever deeper technological attitude toward nature. This kind of criticism refers to the existence of different kinds of nature and their respective values. In his 'Landscape and Memory' (1995) Simon Schama advances the proposition that there have always been two kinds of Arcadia: the primitive and the pastoral. In the primitive Arcadia, nature is rough, untamed and separated from culture and society, whereas in the pastoral Arcadia nature and (agri-)culture are seen as inseparable (see also Adams, 1996; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Van Koppen, 2002). Whereas conservationists value both primitive and pastoral kinds of nature, most restorationists seem to have a strong preference for nature in its primitive form.

The second kind of criticism points to restoration as an elaborate practice of fakery. In his essay 'Faking nature' Robert Eliot (1982) describes restoration as

a kind of forgery, comparable to an art forgery. In an art forgery even a perfect copy loses the value of the original artwork: what is missing is the causal history of the original, the fact that a particular human artist created a specific work in a specific historical period. Although the copy may be as superficially pleasing as the original, the knowledge that it is not the work created by the artist distorts and disvalues our experience. Similarly, Eliot argues, we value a natural area because of its specific kind of continuity with the past (Eliot, 1982: 86).

Birch and Katz reason along the same lines. According to Birch, humanity in general, and 'the imperium' in particular, attempt to 'fix' and mould nature in order to dominate it (the control of 'otherness'). Borrowing Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacrum', Birch argues that legally designated wilderness reserves become simulacra insofar as it is possible for 'the imperium' to simulate wildness (Birch, 1990: 17).

For Katz the central issue is the value of the restored environments. If a restored environment is an adequate replacement for the previously existing natural environment, then the result is that humans can use, degrade, destroy, and replace natural entities and habitats with no moral consequences whatsoever. After all, the value in the original natural entity does not require preservation (Katz, 1992: 269). According to Katz, however, the value of the restored environment is questionable. Referring to Eliot's analogy of art forgery, Katz wonders 'how is the value of artefacts, and the derivative, moral obligations, different from the value and moral obligations concerning 'wild nature?' (Katz, 1992: 270). The answer is in the distinction between the anthropocentric instrumentality of artefacts and the essential characteristics of natural entities, species and ecosystems. Nature is not merely the physical matter that is the *object* of technological practice and alteration; it is also a *subject* with its own process and history of development independent of human intervention and activity. Nature thus has a value that can be subverted and destroyed by the process of human domination. In this way, human domination, alteration, and management are issues of moral concern (Katz, 1992: 271).

The third and final kind of criticism has to do with the practice of ecosystem mitigation. In cases of strong development pressure, for instance along the eastern seaboard of the US, property developers gaze longingly at parcels that are protected by local, state or federal environmental statutes. A popular approach is to compensate, or mitigate, the effects of development on, say, a coastal wetland, with purchase, dedication, and restoration of another property of equal ecological value (Higgs, 2003: 207–8). For Higgs, mitigation is a clear example of the commodification of restoration; restored ecosystems are converted to tradable units for consumption. Mitigation also illustrates the commodification of practice, and for that reason most restorationists view mitigation projects as a crass commercial endeavour that ought to be avoided (Higgs, 2003: 208).<sup>3</sup>

In his answer to the different criticisms, and in his analysis of the features of what good ecological restoration should look like, Higgs distinguishes between

## 'NEW NATURE'

four keystone concepts: focal practice, ecological integrity, historical fidelity and, finally, intention or design.

Focal practice is based on the idea that to restore successfully in the long run, the people involved need to be strongly committed to restoration. According to Light, ecological restoration has inherent democratic potential: restoration practised well would preserve 'the democratic ideal that democratic participation in a public activity increases the value of that activity' (Light, 2000: 164).

Focal restoration, Higgs argues, should be clearly distinguished from technological restoration, the area of restoration mega-projects, mitigation initiatives, and expanding companies specialising in restoration (Higgs, 2003: 3). While technological restoration is poised to overtake focal restoration, Higgs warns against too much polarisation: focal and technological restoration are not mutually exclusive per se (Higgs, 2003: 12).

Ecological integrity, the second keystone concept, points to the fact that ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery and management of the very integrity of ecosystems. Ecological integrity, however, not only includes a critical range of variability in biodiversity, ecological processes and structures, but also of regional and historical context, as well as sustainable cultural practices (Higgs, 2003: 109). Many restorationists are inclined to forget these social and cultural variables.

Higgs' third keystone concept is historical fidelity. To restore something first means to consider what that thing is and what it means; knowing the history of a place is a prerequisite to understanding it. Restoring an ecosystem, however, always involves an arbitrary choice of historical conditions. The difficulty of determining appropriate reference conditions, whether a fixed historical point in time or a suite of specific ecological conditions, is one of the central challenges in ecological restoration (Higgs, 2003: 119).

Intention or design, the fourth key concept, points to the fact that ecological restoration is an intentional manipulation of ecosystems in accordance with our values, or what *we* think ecosystems ought to value (Higgs, 2003: 13). For that reason, Higgs emphasises the idea of reciprocity between restorationists and ecosystems, and among science, aesthetics (cultural values), and participation. For most restoration initiatives, he concludes, the ultimate success of a deliberately intended or designed project depends on participation by as many people as practically possible (Higgs, 2003: 286–7).

#### ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE DUTCH POLITICS OF NATURE: AN OVERVIEW <sup>4</sup>

The Netherlands is a small country with a total surface of 3.4 million ha (200 km x 170 km). With its 16 million inhabitants, the Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world; however 60 per cent of its total sur-

face is covered by farmlands and meadows. The landscape is rather diverse, and varies from dunes, dikes and polders in the western and northern parts of the country to sandy soils, forests and hills in the eastern and southern parts. The river Rhine and its different branches physically and culturally divide the country into a northern and a southern part. Seen from a comparative point of view, the special importance of the Dutch landscape is in its man-made character and its long cultural and agricultural history (Haartsen, 1995: 31).

The most important conservation and environmental organisations that have played a role in the politics of new nature include the Dutch Society for the Protection of Nature Monuments ('Natuurmonumenten'); the Dutch branch of WWF; the Foundation for Nature and Environment (SNM); and the Dutch branch of Friends of the Earth.

Natuurmonumenten, founded in 1906, is a mass-membership conservation organisation with a total constituency of almost one million members (Van der Heijden 2002: 125). Its main strategy is the purchasing and management of real estate, woods and other valuable lands. Its total property amounts to more than 80.000 ha, spread over 200 different estates.

The Dutch branch of WWF (825,000 supporters) is the most important civil society actor in the Dutch politics of nature development. Whereas before 1990 WWF spent most of its donations on wilderness protection in southern countries, during the last decade and a half WWF has started to acquire thousands of hectares of land for the development of new nature.

The Foundation for Nature and Environment (SNM) is an umbrella organisation of twenty different environmental and conservation groups. As its very name suggests, the organisation tries to balance the sometimes opposing interests of nature and the environment.

Friends of the Earth, including its Dutch branch 'Vereniging Milieudefensie' (70,000 members) is an environmental, rather than a conservation, organisation. Like SNM, but contrary to Natuurmonumenten and WWF, FoE always tries to link environmental and conservation interests (Van der Heijden, 2002).

As for the relationship between nature and (agri-)culture, twentieth century Dutch politics of nature have always oscillated between two policy orientations: 'separation of functions' (especially the 'functions' of agriculture and nature) versus 'interweaving of functions' (Dekker 2002; Van der Windt 1995; Van Koppen 2002).

In the first policy orientation, nature and agriculture do constitute two distinct policy areas. As a result of the massive land consolidation and land use planning projects of the 1950s, nature and landscape had increasingly become separated. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an increasing intensifying of agriculture, especially the use of chemicals. Environmental groups like SNM and FoE criticised the exclusively area-centered (buying and physical planning) approach of the conservationists: too much attention was paid to the protection

## 'NEW NATURE'

of nature reserves, too little to pollution (e.g. by agriculture) in the natural areas outside these reserves (Van der Windt, 1995).

The political instrument that attuned the interests of agriculture, nature and landscape was a 1975 government White Paper. In order to protect or bring about 'natural values' in agricultural areas, the White Paper introduced the possibility of government-sponsored management agreements between the government and farmers. Issues to be settled in management agreements included, for instance, the intensity and the way the soil was being used. Not mowing in Spring until a certain date in order to give grassland birds time to breed is a well-known example.

From the 1980s onward, however, the interest in 'interweaving' nature and (agri-)culture ebbed, as a new set of ideas transformed the discussion. It started with the Oostvaardersplassen, a large wetland area that emerged, quasi-spontaneously, during and after the creation of a new polder, the Flevopolder. While the construction works of inpoldering were largely considered to be a new threat to nature, at one and the same time the area surprisingly became one of the key breeding areas for a great variety of birds. This course of events caused a cognitive shift: apparently it was possible to actually 'create' or 'facilitate' nature. Nature policy makers realised that one does not have to restrict oneself to conserving 'what is left' of nature; if nature has a capacity to regenerate itself, the politics of nature might explore new routes (Hajer 2003: 105).

The Oostvaardersplassen case provoked a large number of ideas, theoretical underpinnings and concrete projects of what became to be called the discourse of 'nature development' or 'new nature'. One of the very first elaborations has been the 'Plan Ooievaar' (Stork Plan), the result of a competition held by the National Dutch Physical Planning Agency about the future of the Dutch river basin.

According to the prize-winning competitors – a small group of ecologists and landscape architects – one does not have to wait for coincidences like in the Oostvaardersplassen case: it is possible to 'help nature' to restore itself. Nature should regain hegemony along the rivers: summer dikes should be moved away, agriculture should retire behind the heavier winter dikes, river forelands should be 'given back to nature'.

The competitors linked this idea to a second idea: the extraction of minerals as an important financial resource for nature development. For many years the extractors of shingle had been blamed for spoiling the river landscape, but the competitors proposed to change this zero or even negative-sum game into a win-win situation: extracting shingle could provide for the resources to make the nature development plans cost-effective.

The Oostvaardersplassen case and the Stork Plan were key variables that enabled the opening of a policy window in Dutch governmental politics of nature, resulting in the 1990 Nature Policy Plan. The creation of 'new nature', however, was not restricted to the river basin in the middle of the country. Im-



portant other examples include the Grensmaas (Border Meuse) in the south, the Gelderse Poort (Guelders Gate) in the east, and the Blauwe Stad (Blue City) in the northern province of Groningen. In sum, during the 1990s more than 100 different nature development projects were planned.

The creation of new nature along the banks of the river Meuse at the Dutch-Belgian border is basically similar to the principles of the Stork Plan described above. It is intended to produce 35 million tons of shingle as well as at least 1,000 ha of new nature.

The Guelders Gate is the 25,000 ha area where the river Rhine leaves Germany and flows into The Netherlands. Situated at the head of the Delta, the area holds a strategic position in the ecological restoration of the Dutch river region. The return of natural processes along the river Rhine, and the grazing of semi-wild horses and cattle at a density of one animal per 3 to 4 ha has encouraged a varying landscape of flowering meadows, alluvial woodland, thickets and seasonal brushwoods to develop (Helmer, Litjens and Overmars, 1993).

The Blue City is a different story. Whereas nowadays 60 per cent of the total surface of the Netherlands is covered by farmlands and meadows, as a consequence of EU agricultural politics, this percentage is envisaged to decline considerably during the next couple of decades.<sup>5</sup> Hundreds of farmers will have to stop their enterprises, and an important part of the land becoming available is intended to be used for nature development. Dikes will be cut, lands flooded, not only for the creation of new nature but also for the economic recovery of individual regions. In the sparsely populated region of Groningen, a lake with a surface of 800 ha and an adjacent nature development area of 350 ha have been projected, surrounded by some 1500 houses: the Blue City. These houses are intended to constitute a highly attractive setting and should contribute to the cost-effectiveness of new nature.

New nature will also constitute an important part of the National Ecological Network (NEN), the centre point of the Dutch politics of nature. The National Ecological Network is a coherent structure of natural areas, an 'infrastructure of nature' which is intended to encompass a surface of 750,000 ha by 2020, more than 20 per cent of the total surface of the country (Dekker 2002: 138). In the 1990 Nature Policy Plan a total budget of 2.7 billion euro was calculated for the period until 2015, mainly for the purchasing of (superfluous agricultural) lands.<sup>6</sup>

A leading role in many nature development projects was played by the Dutch branch of WWF. In many cases WWF cooperates with the government Department of Transport and Infrastructure, recreation centres, the Dutch Road Users Association ANWB, and the clay and shingle industry, all having their own individual reasons to embrace nature development. Common practice is that private business, after the extraction of clay and shingle, leaves the area in order to enable nature development, by means of which the area can fulfil both nature and recreational functions.

## 'NEW NATURE'

WWF has even managed to win over the main conservation association Natuurmonumenten, previously fiercely opposed to the whole idea of nature development (Keulartz 1999: 90). However, whereas WWF exclusively aims at 'new nature', for Natuurmonumenten it is just a complementary strategy (Van der Windt 1995: 208–9). Nevertheless, in 1997, WWF and Natuurmonumenten jointly published 'Veters los', a four billion euro 'green infrastructure' plan, aimed at the production of even more new nature than the government had proposed (De Rijk, 1998).

The 1990 Nature Policy Plan wanted to develop the National Ecological Network in a top-down way, strongly emphasising nature development, and without consulting the people most concerned. An important breach, however, in the euphoria occurred with the massive farmers protest in Gaasterland in the northern province of Friesland in the early 1990s (Keulartz et al., 2000). After the government had imposed the decision to transform 550 ha of agricultural land into a nature development area, the regional population rose in revolt. The farmers constructed an enormous, 10 x 20 metre empty picture frame and erected it in the fields: 'Look; this beauty has been made and managed by us. You cannot decide on it without our involvement.' (Hajer, 2003: 91).

The protest of the Gaasterland farmers did not stand on its own. From the very beginning of the new nature euphoria onwards, the Foundation for Nature and Environment (SNM) strongly pled for a double-strategy. On the one hand it acknowledged the importance of large nature-areas with an important degree of self-regulation and completeness. On the other hand, however, SNM asked for a basic reorientation in agricultural land-use planning and a viable expansion and broader acceptance of management agreements.

Partly in response to these criticisms, but also to changing external circumstances (EU politics with respect to countryside development), the Department of Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries started to defend the importance of interweaving. Farmers were supposed to play an important role as managers of nature and landscape; 'agricultural nature' is not less valuable than nature in remote areas; and, finally, protection of nature and the environment should become part of the EU Common Agricultural Politics (CAP).

In the year 2000 a new government White Paper was published, the successor of the 1990 Nature Policy Plan. In this new White Paper, 'Nature for People, People for Nature', both nature development and interweaving as described above did have their own place. Much attention was also paid also to generating public support for specific, area-linked policy measures. Furthermore, in this White Paper interweaving not only referred to the interweaving of nature and agriculture, but also to the interweaving of nature with other economic functions like recreation.

How should this development be assessed? Which environmental values were emphasised, and which ones were played down?

## NATURE DEVELOPMENT OR CONSERVATION? AN ANALYSIS OF TWO DISCOURSES

In the first section of this paper nature development has been framed as a specific form of ecological restoration. In that section three bodies of criticism with respect to nature restoration were reviewed: the one on the relation between restoration and conservation, the one on restoration as a kind of forgery, and, finally, mitigation. Thereafter four features of 'good ecological restoration' were described: focal practice, ecological integrity, historical fidelity, and intention or design. What does an analysis of the Dutch politics of nature development in terms of these seven parameters tell us about the environmental values of the different parts of the Dutch environmental movement?

*Restoration or conservation?*

After the 'discovery' of nature development at the end of the 1980s, two different discourses emerged.<sup>7</sup> The first one, led by WWF, but also including groups like Critical Forest Management and Critical Fauna Management (Keulartz, 1999: 86), focused exclusively on nature development and was hardly interested in other forms of nature. In the second discourse, in which environmental groups like Friends of the Earth, the Foundation for Nature and Environment and numerous local groups played an important role, restoration and conservation were seen as complementary. Consequently, the two discourses implied different ideas about the relation between (agri-)culture and nature, ecological mitigation, ecological fidelity and integrity, and so on.

The 'nature development discourse' could be defined as 'separatist', It not only stresses and enhances the opposition between people and nature, but it also distinguishes itself clearly from other policy fields like agriculture, environmental politics and so on. Due to this reductive point of view, nature can be managed more easily than in the integrated nature-culture approach of the 'conservationist discourse'. For policy makers in the present era of state-withdrawal and reduction of government tasks, this is an attractive option.<sup>8</sup>

The 'conservation discourse', on the other hand, leaves ample room for nature development if appropriate, but also stresses the importance of interweaving nature and agriculture.<sup>9</sup> In this discourse, a more integral vision on nature, agriculture and the relationship between the two has been developed, whereas concrete solutions and policy choices are considered to be dependent on local circumstances. In this respect the discourse reflects the expansion and increasing complexity of the contemporary political sphere.

## 'NEW NATURE'

*Real nature?*

In a 1990 exploratory study two civil servants of the department of Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries – including Frans Vera, the Dutch champion of nature development – sketched the deplorable state of Dutch nature:

Our so-called natural areas usually are cultural landscapes passed into disuse. Although the landscape may still look rather pretty, the Netherlands basically consists of dismantled nature. Seen from an ecological point of view, the Netherlands is not less than a disaster area. (Baerselman and Vera, 1990).

Nature development was seen as the remedy, not only for nature but also for the Dutch population. The first large-scale attempt was the Guelders gate: 'The return of natural processes along the Dutch rivers meets the growing need to experience nature as a wilderness in the densely populated Netherlands' (Helmer, Litjens and Overmars, 1993).

But how natural is 'new nature' as championed by WWF? First of all one should realise that 'original nature' does not exist anymore in the Netherlands; nature is a part of the cultural landscape and includes (some forms of) culture (Van Koppen, 2002).

Secondly, the nature development discourse is eager to define itself as an ecocentric discourse, stressing the 'intrinsic value' of nature. At closer inspection, however, the parallel with an ecocentric versus an anthropocentric conception of nature requires qualification. Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, 'new nature' in the nature development discourse could be described as 'nature in the age of its technical reproducibility'. 'New nature' turns out to be not less man-made than nature in its pastoral shape. On the contrary, nature development essentially means the production of primitive nature by man. This is illustrated by the beavers and other animals that are put out in nature development areas, which are provided with small transmitting equipment in order to monitor all their movements. In this respect nature development could be called a form of 'radicalised anthropocentrism'.

*Ecological mitigation*

A function fulfilled by many nature development projects is ecological mitigation or, as it is being called in the Netherlands, nature compensation. Some conservation groups may agree with the construction of new motorways, industrial parks, etc., in exchange for the development of new nature.

Groups like WWF generally embrace ecological mitigation, as they define nature as transferable: it can be built everywhere and the building of 'new nature' has greater value than the protection of individual landscape against the construction of new infrastructure (Van der Heijden, 2004).

Ideas about ecological mitigation are strongly connected to ideas about agriculture. According to most defenders of nature development, agriculture

results in the disappearance of species and is best executed as intensively as possible (bio-industry). The only valuable nature is the nature of the National Ecological Network; the rest could best be seen as 'non-nature' which, however, could be used for nature development. So, new nature in exchange for the construction of infrastructure outside the National Ecological Network is seen as a positive-sum game.

'Nature compensation' has led to bitter clashes between groups like Natuurmonumenten, who generally embrace the principle, and groups like Friends of the Earth and SNM who sometimes are strongly opposed to it. Examples include the extensions of Schiphol Airport, and of the port of Rotterdam ('Tweede Maasvlakte') into the North Sea. In both cases Natuurmonumenten agreed with the intended extensions in exchange for 'new nature', whereas Friends of the Earth and SNM fervently resisted the plans (Kleijburg, 1998: 19). But farmers' organisations like WLTO are opposed also. According to its representative Arie van den Brand, 'it is great that in the near future one eighth of the Netherlands will consist of nature, but at the same time some conservation associations allow seven eighths of the Netherlands to be built over in a large-scale and monotonous way' (De Rijk, 1998).

A final issue of nature compensation to be addressed here is the kind of target types aimed at. Whereas for some natural target types (marshes, flowering meadows), the prospects of successful and quick nature compensation are favourable, for most of them (high moorlands, oak woods) they definitely are not. Woods do not develop within a couple of years and so for this kind of natural target types, compensation is not an obvious solution (Prins et al., 2004). Groups generally in favour of nature compensation are not always aware of this; the result could be more monotonous nature and landscapes. However, 'an extended, monotonous coniferous forest is ecologically less important than a small moorland with some rare species' (Dijksterhuis, 1997: 10).

#### *Focal restoration*

Focal restoration is the idea that to restore successfully in the long run, people need to be strongly committed to restoration.

The leading civil society actor in the nature development discourse was WWF. Contrary to many other conservation groups, WWF did not have any left-wing ideological roots, which enabled it to collaborate with partners like the Department of Transport and Infrastructure, the clay and shingle industry and the Dutch Road Users Association, a collaboration that a left-wing organisation would have resisted. This lack of a broader ideological framework, however, also prevented WWF from operating as a real public or general interest group.

Another consequence was that WWF, an NGO without a strong democratic tradition, eagerly supported the top-down approach with which the Dutch gov-

## 'NEW NATURE'

ernment originally tried to implement its nature development plans ('conceive-decide-implement': Hajer, 2003: 93).

However, whereas for the Dutch government nature development might have been an innovative way of acting upon the Rio Declaration, for the local communities it was a denial of their identity. For many of them the landscape was not a mere 'surface', waiting for a plan; it was loaded with meaning and signifiers, stories and achievements (Hajer, 2003: 93). For many farmers, nature development even meant complete craziness. Fine agricultural land, reclaimed from the water and the barren sand with sweat and determination by their fathers and grandfathers – and sometimes even by themselves – had to be brought back into its primary state – whatever that might have been (Mak, 1994).

During the 1990s large-scale resistance emerged in many parts of the country (Buys and Van der Molen, 2004; Grammen and Keulartz, 1996; Wissenhof and Goverde, 1997). In some cases local resistance was so strong that the plans were abandoned (Van der Windt, Swart and Rabbinge, 1997). In response, the government turned from blue-print planning to a participatory and interactive policy approach. In many cases, support could only be guaranteed by concessions like recreational facilities, house-building, and agrarian management of nature in or nearby the nature development areas (Wissenhof and Goverde, 1997). Consequently, as a result of the shift from rules and regulations to consultation and consensus, the scope of nature policy was significantly broadened from intrinsic value to aesthetic and instrumental values (Keulartz et al., 2004: 84).

How should this shift be assessed? In order to answer this question it is necessary to deal with another keystone concept of ecological restoration: ecological integrity.

*Ecological integrity*

Ecological restoration has been defined as the process of assisting the recovery and management of ecological integrity. According to Higgs, ecological integrity not only includes a critical range of variability in biodiversity and ecological processes and practices, but also taking into account regional and historical contexts, as well as sustainable cultural practices. In the Dutch politics of nature these three elements could be translated as sufficiently dealing with a) different forms of nature; b) cultural landscapes; c) the relationship between nature development and environmentalism.

Nature developers and environmentalists disagree about the relationship between agriculture, nature and the environment. Nature developers are strongly opposed to the whole idea of 'farmers' nature' or, as Dekker (2002) calls it, 'common nature'. In the words of Ed Nijpels, chairman of WWF, 'farmers' nature is equal to sick nature, in need of constant care' (quoted in Keulartz 1999: 97).

Conservationists and environmentalists, on the other hand, argue that, although farmers' nature is strongly bound to land use, and although it is part of

the agricultural landscape, it contains valuable natural elements: hedges, trees, ditches, etc. As one concerned conservationist puts it: 'Because of the increasing separation between nature and agriculture, interesting brackish water environments in agricultural areas are deemed to disappear. Nature conservation often is at the expense of biodiversity.' (Dijksterhuis, 1997: 10).

According to this discourse, in the Netherlands different forms of nature do exist next to one another: the spectrum ranges from 'urban nature' and nature-friendly forestry, via modern and traditional (pastoral) farmers' nature, to the more primitive nature in the reserves and nature development areas, and all of them have their own individual value (Van Koppen, 2002). According to this vision, agriculture, nature and environment are closely connected. In order to push back bio-industry and pesticides, and to make agriculture more environmentally sound, a more extensive agriculture is pleaded for.

A second element of ecological integrity is the role of cultural landscapes. What consequences could nature development have for the continued existence of these landscapes? Although at the level of abstraction of the cultural landscape as a whole, nature development projects could be valuable if they fit into and contribute to the character and the identity of the landscape (Haartsen, 1995: 33), in the Dutch practice, nature development is often seen as a threat to the cultural particularity of specific landscapes (Buys and Van der Molen, 2004: 147). Farms are closed, dikes are cut, agricultural lands are flooded, and sometimes even entire villages disappear. As Dutch landscape philosopher Ton Lemaire puts it: 'nature development is similar to nature destruction, as both sidetrack the history of the landscape' (Lemaire, 1997: 121).

The third element of historical integrity is the relationship between nature development, agriculture and environmental politics. According to the nature development discourse, agriculture inevitably results in the disappearance of species. Nature development benefits from intensive agriculture with a high yield per hectare, as only this will free sufficient acreage to be used for new nature (Keulartz, 1999: 97). For this reason, bio-industry rather than ecological and bio-dynamic farming is being encouraged. Conservationists and environmentalists on the other hand see an important role for farmers in the management of nature and landscape. The way agriculture is being practised makes a lot of difference for the variety and richness of the landscape: large-scale or small-scale farming, agriculture with or without pesticides, etc.

Finally, in the nature development discourse relatively little emphasis is put on the environmental conditions in the nature development areas, and on the importance of environmental politics in general. However, according to the Dutch Nature Policy Assessment Office, large parts of the envisioned National Ecological Network are still suffering from acidification, eutrophication, and unfavourable hydrological conditions. Therefore, reaching nature quality targets depends to a large extent on the coherence of policy on environmental quality, water regimes, and land-use (Van Oostenbrugge et al., 2001: 262–3).

## 'NEW NATURE'

*Historical fidelity*

Restoring an ecosystem always involves an arbitrary choice of historical conditions. Which different conceptions of nature constitute the basis of the nature development and conservation discourses respectively?

The primitive nature of the nature development discourse is a nature without culture and without human interference; nature is stripped from its history, left to itself, left to its own intrinsic values. .

Nature development takes place according to 'pre-historical' ecological references. 'How would nature in the Netherlands under the present climatic conditions have looked, if man had not caused all kinds of changes?' (Vera, 1992: 21). It is a hypothetical image, an image that scientists try to construct as a puzzle by comparing affected ecological systems at our geographical latitude with unaffected ecosystems in other continents (Baerselman and Vera, 1989). A practical consequence of this way of reasoning could, for instance, be the reintroductions of aurochs, sea eagles, and wolves, species that disappeared from the Netherlands many decades or even centuries ago.

Conservationists, on the other hand, stick to quite another kind of historical fidelity; they often refer to an image of the Dutch landscape as it was around 1850 (Van der Windt, 1995; Van Koppen, 2002). This pastoral landscape necessarily includes (some forms of) culture. For this reason pastoral nature could be called 'historical nature', as it reflects the interventions of mankind in nature and landscape in history. It is an anthropocentric way of looking at nature: nature in the Netherlands is basically man-made.

*Intention or design*

Ecological restoration, as Higgs argues, is an intentional manipulation of ecosystems in accordance with our values, or what we think ecosystems ought to value.

The core of the 1990 Nature Policy Plan was to realise a National Ecological Network, a coherent network of sustainable ecosystems of (inter)national importance. This could be achieved by enlarging existing nature areas, preventing fragmentation and creating new natural areas. The main objective was to maintain and improve biodiversity (Van Zadelhoff and Lammers, 1995). The natural targets were systematically defined by the government, the results could be evaluated (Haartsen, 1995: 33), and even a procedure for constructing different scenarios for nature development has been developed (Harms et al., 1995). All this could be called a form of eco-technology (Grammen and Keulartz, 1996).

However, whereas until the early 1990s researchers and planners fulfilled a leading role in the Dutch policy of nature ('technocratic model'), researchers like Frans Vera were among the most fervent advocates of nature development, and so obviously played a double role. As Keulartz observes: 'the fact that nature developers have succeeded in presenting their image of nature as the only



objective and scientifically legitimate representation is the very reason why they have been able to monopolise the social debate on nature and landscape' (Keulartz, 1999: 96).

After the wave of resistance in Gaasterland and other areas, politicians took the lead ('decisionistic model') (Brennikmeyer and Dekker, 2001), although decision-making increasingly became interactive (Hajer, 2003).

As a result, in the government white paper 'Nature for People, People for Nature' (2000) attention shifted from biodiversity to the meaning nature and landscape have for people. This meaning varies strongly, as is also shown by different evaluation studies (Buys and Van der Molen, 2004; Wissenhof and Goverde, 1997).

## CONCLUSION

In the Dutch politics of 'new nature' two discourses have been identified. Groups adhering to the nature development discourse prefer ecological restoration rather than conservation; perceive new nature as 'real' nature; embrace ecological mitigation; don't stress political participation; interpret ecological integrity mainly in terms of variability in biodiversity; maintain an 'a-historic' definition of nature; and, finally, embrace eco-technology. In their 'cognitive praxis' (Jamison, Eyerman and Cramer, 1990) they definitely presented new thoughts and ideas, but at the same time they manifested themselves as single issue interest groups, rather than as social movement organisations with a universalistic view. The way these groups dealt with nature compensation, cultural landscapes and local interests, as well as the fact that they hardly worried about the environmental consequences resulting from intensive forms of agriculture, or even promoted them, are illustrative examples of what Higgs would call 'bad ecological restoration'.

Environmental groups adhering to the conservation discourse (SNM, Friends of the Earth) on the other hand, try to play the role of watchdog of the general interest, rather than promoting just one sectoral interest. They try to accommodate as much as possible the different interests of nature, environment and agriculture, and thus, to broaden the politics of nature. This implies a broad societal discussion on nature development (Van der Windt 1995: 267; Van Koppen 2002); the pursuit of 'democratic landscapes' by means of democratic deliberation (Keulartz 1999: 101); a multifunctional approach of nature (Dekker 2002); and deliberative policy analysis (Hajer 2003: 103).

Van der Windt, Swart and Rabbinge (1997) make a distinction between 'ecological development of nature' (self-regulating eco-systems, little participation, mono-functionality, etc.), and 'societal development of nature' (less far-reaching ecological goals, much participation, multi-functionality, etc.). The paradox of the politics of new nature in the Netherlands – and perhaps of ecological restora-

## 'NEW NATURE'

tion in general – is that 'ecological development of nature' results into 'better nature', but at the same time could be qualified as 'bad ecological restoration'. For 'societal development of nature' the opposite applies: 'good ecological restoration', but less 'pure nature'. However, in both cases nature is man-made, and so societal development of nature seems to be the preferable alternative.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will use the term environmental movement as a movement that also includes the conservation movement, as is common practice for most authors in the field (e.g. Dalton 1994; Rootes, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> In 2002 the Society for Ecological Restoration defined ecological restoration simply as 'the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has degraded, damaged, or destroyed' (Higgs, 2003: 110). For an overview of the history of this definition, see Higgs, 2003, ch. 3).

<sup>3</sup> The restoration projects by IBM and Red Wing Shoes outside of Minneapolis provide a strong example. These prairie restorations were undertaken to increase the cultural capital of each corporation as a friend of nature and a regionally grounded local enterprise (Light and Higgs, 1996: 240).

<sup>4</sup> The empirical data for this paper have been collected by means of analysis of different kinds of documents, interviews with experts and activists, and site visits.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), the surplus will amount to as much as 2,000,000 ha, more than half of the total surface of the country. In WRR's most far-reaching scenario, soil-related agriculture will almost completely disappear from the Netherlands (Gerrie and Horlings 1995: 131).

<sup>6</sup> The Dutch National Ecological Network does not stand on its own; it is intended to become part of an EU-wide ecological network, Nature 2000, which will be implemented by means of two EU-directives: the Habitat and the Birds Directive.

<sup>7</sup> A discourse is conceived of as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that is produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities' (Hajer, 1995: 44).

<sup>8</sup> Apart from this, as Hajer observes, at an operational level the discourse of nature development derived its popularity among policy makers from its measurability, allowing them to raise questions like 'How many acres have been transformed into nature?'; 'How many target types have returned?'; 'How many connections have been established?' (Hajer 2003:109). In this respect the discourse of new nature perfectly fits within the broader discourse of ecological modernisation.

<sup>9</sup> An intermediary role was played by Natuurmonumenten, the largest Dutch conservation group. Whereas WWF embodied the large-scale variant of nature development, Natuurmonumenten mainly dealt with small-scale forms of ecological restoration: de-canalisation of brooks, the digging of small lakes, etc. (Van der Windt et al., 1997).

## REFERENCES

- Adams, W. 1996. *Future Nature: A Vision for Conservation*. London: Earthscan.
- Baerselman, F. and F. Vera 1989. *Natuurontwikkeling*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Landbouw en Visserij.
- Birch, T. 1990. 'The Incarceration of Wildness: Wilderness areas as Prisons', *Environmental Ethics* 12: 3–26.
- Brennikmeyer, B. and J. Dekker 2001. 'Verbinden Verbindingszones ook Natuuronderzoek en Natuurbeleid?' *De Levende Natuur* 102: 265–9.
- Buys, A. and D. van der Molen 2004. 'Beleving van Natuurontwikkeling in de Uiterwaarden', *Landschap* 21 (3): 147–57.
- Dalton, R. 1994. *The Green Rainbow: Environmental Groups in Western Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dekker, J. 2002. *Dynamiek in de Nederlandse Natuurbescherming*. Ph.D. thesis. Utrecht: Utrecht University.
- De Rijk, M. 1998. 'Groene Schaamlappen', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, March 11.
- Dijksterhuis, K. 1997. 'Natuurcompensatie ten Koste van Biodiversiteit', *Milieudefensie* 26 (9): 10–11.
- Eden, S., S. Tunstall and S. Tapsell 2000. 'Translating Nature: River Restoration and Nature-Culture'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 257–73.
- Eliot, R. 1982. 'Faking Nature'. *Inquiry* 25: 81–93.
- Eliot, R. 1997. *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration*. London: Routledge.
- Gerrie, J. and I. Horlings 1995. 'Landbouw en Natuur Samen in een Hoofdstructuur', in K. Bouwer and P. Leroy (eds.), *Milieu en Ruimte*. Amsterdam: Boom, p. 128–63.
- Grammen, B. and J. Keulartz 1996. 'Natuurontwikkeling ter Discussie', *Filosofie en Praktijk* 17: 14–27.
- Haartsen, A. 1995. 'Natuur versus Cultuur? Natuurontwikkeling, Landschapsbehoud en de Identiteit van het Cultuurlandschap', *Landschap* 12: 31–4.
- Hajer, M. 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hajer, M. 2003. 'A Frame in the Fields: Policymaking and the Reinvention of Politics', in M. Hajer and H. Wagenaar (eds.), *Deliberative Policy Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 88–110.
- Harms, B., W. Knol and J. Roos – Klein Lankhorst 1995. 'Het Leidess Model. Een Gebiedsgericht Kennismodel bij Scenario's voor Natuurontwikkeling'. *Landschap* 12: 83–98.
- Helmer, W., G. Litjens and W. Overmars 1993. 'De Gelderse Poort: Entrée van de Toekomst'. *Landschap* 10: 69–83.
- Higgs, E. 2003. *Nature by Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Jamison, A., R. Eyerman and J. Cramer 1990. *The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## 'NEW NATURE'

- Katz, E. 1992. 'The Call of the Wild: The Struggle Against Domination and the Technological Fix of Nature', *Environmental Ethics* 14: 265–73.
- Kern, K. 1992. 'Rehabilitation of Trees in South-West Germany', in P. Boon, P. Calow and G. Patts (eds), *River Restoration and Management*. Chichester: Wiley, p. 321–35.
- Keulartz, J. 1999. 'Engineering the Environment: The Politics of Nature Development', in M. Hajer and F. Fischer (eds.), *Living with Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 83–102.
- Keulartz, J., S. Swart and H. van der Windt 2000. *Natuurbeelden en Natuurbeleid*. Den Haag: NWO.
- Keulartz, J., H. van der Windt and J. Swart 2004. 'Concepts of Nature as Communicative Devices: The Case of Dutch Nature Policy', *Environmental Values* 13: 81–99.
- Kleijburg, H. 1998 'Natuur bij Gratie van de Snelweg', *Milieudefensie* 27 (5): 18–19.
- Lemaire, T. 1996. 'Verloren Landschap', *De Gids* 159: 120–123
- Light, A. 2000. 'Restoration, the Value of Participation and the Risks of Professionalization', in P. Gobster and R. Hull (eds), *Restoring Nature: perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Washington DC: Island Press, p. 163–84.
- Light, A. and E. Higgs 1996. 'The Politics of Ecological Restoration', *Environmental Ethics* 18: 227–47.
- Lipschutz, R. 1996. *Global Civil Society and Global Environmental Governance. The Politics of Nature from Place to Planet*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- MacNaghten, P. and J. Urry 1998. *Contested Natures*. London: Sage.
- Mak, G. 1994. *Hoe God Verdween uit Jorwerd*. Amsterdam: Atlas.
- Prins, D., N. Gijssen and P. Opdam 2004. 'Ruimte voor Natuurcompensatie', *Landschap* 21(2): 105–12.
- Rootes, C. (ed), 2003. *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schama, S. 1995. *Landscape and Memory*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Seffer, J. and W. Stanova (eds.) 1999. *Moravia River Floodplain Meadows – Importance, Restoration and Management*. Bratislava: DAPHNE: Centre for Applied Ecology.
- Van der Heijden, H.A. 2002. 'Dutch Environmentalism at the Turn of the Century', *Environmental Politics* 11: 120–130.
- Van der Heijden, H.A. 2004. 'Natuur- en Milieugroepen – Van Puur Verzet naar Professioneel Onderhandelen', in R. van Es (ed), *Communicatie en Ethiek. Organisaties en hun Publieke Verantwoordelijkheid*. Amsterdam: Boom, p. 167–78.
- Van der Windt, H. 1995. *En dan: Wat is Natuur nog in dit Land? Natuurbescherming in Nederland 1880–1990*. Meppel: Boom.
- Van der Windt, H., J. Swart and R. Rabbinge 1997. 'De Wortels en Dilemma's van Natuurontwikkeling', in N. van de Pol and A. Glasmeier (eds), *Natuurontwikkeling: Waarom en Hoe?* Den Haag: Rathenau Instituut, pp. 19–39.
- Van Koppen, C. 2002. *Echte Natuur*. Ph.D.-thesis. Wageningen: Wageningen University.
- Van Oostenbrugge, R., S. Ligthart and J. Notenboom 2001. 'Natuurbalans 2001: Behoud van Natuur en Landschap Vraagt meer Samenhang in Beleid'. *De Levende Natuur* 102: 261–3.

Van Zadelhoff, E. and W. Lammers 1995. 'The Dutch Ecological Network', *Landschap* 12 (3): 77–88.

Vera, F. 1992. 'Ecologische Overwegingen', *Cahiers Bio-wetenschappen en Maatschappij*, 15: 15–23.

Wissenhof, J. and H. Goverde 1997. 'Groen Licht voor Groen? Strategische Groenprojecten Natuurontwikkeling Bestuurskundig Beschouwd'. *Landschap* 10: 69–83.