



# DUTCH GOVERNMENTALITY

An analysis of the mythologizing and de-mythologizing  
aspects of the polder model

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## **Preface**

Combining ancient history and archaeology with public administration might seem silly, but it is convincingly very compatible - even more so than I ever expected. The topic of this thesis went through a long road of development. It started just after my first Masters in classical culture. During the masterclass classical culture that I participated in in Rome and Istanbul I was inspired by the idea of the archaeology of myth. The way that places, objects, and stories can function as a means to either explain circumstances, to create identities or both, back then but even more so now. I got so interested in this topic that I wanted to deepen my knowledge in this area, and I applied and was accepted to spend a semester at the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World in Providence, Rhode Island, USA, as a visiting scholar. The learning experience at the Joukowsky Institute was one of kind and after returning to the Netherlands, I had anticipated to write a thesis on cultural heritage in the Netherlands, and the influence of the government on selective and biased representation of history. However, after some deliberation, and with the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Jan-Kees Helderma, we agreed that a topic that would cover the polder model and its (de-)mythologizing characteristics would be a good way to go for a Master's thesis. It is an unconventional topic with an unconventional approach. That is what drew me to combine various theories from different disciplines and try to make sense of everything that is happening around us. No straightforward way of working, and thinking outside the box kept this research interesting for me.

I would like to start with thanking Dr. Jan-Kees Helderma for his enthusiasm for this topic, and his guidance throughout my research and the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank Mark Bunt for his support and pushing me to keep going. Finally, I thank the Joukowsky Institute for giving me the chance to study and develop myself at their amazing institute.

Frédérique Schless

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Ask an ordinary Dutch citizen to characterize Dutch (socioeconomic) policy making with only a few words, and he or she will most likely answer: the polder model. Then ask what is meant with the polder model and he or she will probably refer to consultation and negotiations aimed at reaching consensus. However, finding the traces of, or the story behind, the origin of the model appears to be more difficult. During the 1980s and the 1990s the economy in the Netherlands suffered severely from the oil crises in the 1970s. When the economy was revived by the Dutch neo-corporatist, socioeconomic and consensus model, it was regarded as a miracle (Andeweg 2000: 706). According to some, this revival needed to be attributed to the polder model. The model gained international momentum since it seemed to cure the 'Dutch disease' (Woldendorp 2005: 2) and, therefore, became known as the 'Dutch Miracle' (Woldendorp 2005: 2; Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 21). In short, the polder model refers to the Dutch consultation economy: this entails the institutions where deliberations between the organizations of the employers and employees take place and the disposition in which this happens (Bos et al. 2007: 9). However, views on the successes of the model are not unambiguous and uncontested, since the model itself has been celebrated as much as it has been unhailed (Woldendorp & Keman 2007: 317).

This is where the problem starts. In this study, I will analyze the polder model as a specific portrayal of the 'governmentality' of the Netherlands (Foucault 1982; Dean 2010). This is of importance, since the polder model is a 'meaningful' concept for Dutch public administration, based on the assumption that it has been part of Dutch society and the Dutch identity for centuries (E.g. Andeweg 2000; Delsen 2002; Woldendorp 2005; Woldendorp & Keman 2007; Bos et al. 2007). Governmentality is about the way we think about governing. Thinking about governing is considered a collective action. It is, therefore, not about the portrayal of individual or conscious ideas, but about the collective bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion in which we are engrossed. Theories such as political myth (e.g. Bottici & Challand 2004; Blumenberg 1985), collective memory (Halbwachs 1941; Rothstein 2000), and neo-corporatism (Schmitter 1974; Woldendorp 2005) are used as a framework to unravel the governmentality of the polder model.

### 1.1 Origin of the Polder Model

The polder model has never been explained in a purely historical discussion. Proponents of the model have argued that the model has always worked well and that it was typically Dutch; opponents associated the model with all kinds of misuses in the Netherlands in their time and in the past (Bos et al. 2007: 7). Different definitions of the polder model are given by various Dutch dictionaries, for example the Van Dale (14th ed.) defines the polder model as a 'consultation model aimed at consensus and harmony, as

practiced during the 90s of the twentieth century’ (also Bos et al. 2007: 9; Andeweg 2000: 697). The Dutch dictionary the Van Dale Hedendaags Nederland provides the following definition: ‘the Dutch economic order in which deliberation between social partners and a moderate wage-development is key’ (also Bos et al. 2007: 9). What becomes clear from these definitions is that they are vaguely formulated and that no distinctive definition for the model is given. In addition, the latter definition appears to solely refer to wage policies although the term itself is used for a large variety of fields and matters in everyday language. While the Dutch polder model is based on the evasion of polarization and the realization of consensus, the term itself is essentially contested (Tielhof 2009: 150). The model evokes various associations, such as: peaceful deliberation, a meeting and discussion culture, a deliberation economy, cooperation on consensus of equality, active participation of all directly involved actors, the search for consensus and compromise, the avoidance of conflict and polarization, and back-room politics (Tielhof 2009: 150). In short, a great deal of sometimes conflicting meanings are ascribed to the model, yet a clear definition of the polder model cannot be provided. Besides these definitions, the polder model is also connected to a particular myth or story that is widely known. This myth is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The polder model derived its name from the Dutch word *polder*, which is a low-lying piece of land that has been reclaimed from a body of water and is protected by dikes. The use of the word polder suggests – whether consciously or not – centuries of continuity, and evokes the image of the Dutch identity that has been determined by the communal battle against water (Andeweg 2000: 698; Bos et al. 2007: 9). By using the word ‘polder model’, it is emphasized that the consultation economy is an essential constituent of the Dutch identity (Andeweg 2000: 698; Bos et al. 2007: 9). This is interesting since the concept itself raises a long history within the Dutch society, while the term itself was not discovered until the 1990s (Bos et al. 2007: 11). The creation of the word has been moderately debated. Three candidates were put forward: Evert Rongen (CEO of DSM Limburg and vice-president of the CDA<sup>1</sup> in the First Chamber), Hans Wijers (Minister of Economic Affairs), and Ina Brouwer (former party-leader of the CPN<sup>2</sup>) (Bos et al. 2007: 11-12). No consensus has been reached on the actual creator of the word.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The polder model has become an ‘iconic’ concept. As explained above, when asked what ordinary Dutch citizens and academic schooled political scientists believe to be the essence of public administration or governance in the Netherlands: the polder model almost immediately comes to mind. The polder model has become an integral part of Dutch society and culture. This research aims to analyze and understand

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<sup>1</sup> *Christen Democratisch Appèl*: the Call of Christian Democracy.

<sup>2</sup> *Communistische Partij Nederland*: Communist Party of the Netherlands.

the meanings that are attached to the polder model as the portrayal of the governmentality of Dutch public administration.

The main question that will be looked at is: *which meanings are attached to the polder model as a portrayal of the 'governmentality' of the Netherlands?*

This main question can be divided into a number of sub-questions:

- *Which theories help us to unravel the governmentality of the polder model in Dutch governance?*
- *How can our understanding and significance of the governmentality of the polder model be researched?*
- *How was the polder model in the Netherlands constituted as a political sociological institution in the 1990s and 2000s?*
- *How is the polder model portrayed between 2009 and 2016 in everyday media and how does this contribute to the mythologizing or de-mythologizing of the polder model?*

In order to understand what this research will be looking at it is important to take note of a few key theories that will allow us to understand governmentality and thoughts on the polder model. The theories that are addressed are governmentality, political myth, collective memory, and neo-corporatism.

### *1.2.1 Governmentality*

Michel Foucault's governmentality theory can be linked to the polder model as dependent variable in order to research whether our view on corporatist governing influences the manner in which we regard the polder model, and how it is reproduced. This concept is consulted because it can provide insight into the reasons of using a neo-corporatist model, and why politicians have turned to the polder model in the past and nowadays renounce it. Foucault described governmentality as a behavior of governments that is based on the 'conduct of conduct'. Dean (1999: 11) formulates the 'conduct of conduct' as follows:

*'Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a divers set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.'*

This notion brings us to the actual concept of governmentality. According to Dean (1999: 16), governmentality is about the way we think about governing, with the different mindset of government.

Thinking about governing is a collective action. It is, therefore, not about the portrayal of individual or conscious ideas, but about the bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion in which we are engrossed.

### *1.2.2 Political myth*

The use of the political myth can explain the actions, the ideas and attitudes behind the governmentality of the polder model. As defined by Bottici and Challand (2004: 320) 'a political myth can be defined as the work on a common narrative, which provides significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group'. The theory of political myth will be used as independent variable in order to aid the explanation of the governmentality and the analytics of government on the polder model. The expectation is that the significance of the use of the polder model can be explained through the application of a political myth and, hence, increases its mythologizing characteristics.

### *1.2.3 Collective Memory*

The second theory that can explain the governmentality of the polder model and Dutch identity is the theory of collective memory. Hence, collective memory is used for the analysis because it can clarify the upcoming of the polder model from situations in the past. The definition that will be applied is based on Halbwachs' assumption of collective memory. Halbwachs (1941: 7) argues that 'collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past [that] adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present' (see also Schwartz 1991: 221). Everything is the way it is today because of what happened in the past. Like political myth, collective memory can explain the collective governmentality of the (mythologizing of the) polder model.

### *1.2.4 Neo-Corporatism*

While theories of political myth and collective memory are important to identify the governmentality of the polder model, they do not explain the working of the model and its de-mythologizing aspects. That is why the theory of neo-corporatism is consulted, since neo-corporatism as a political sociological theory comes closest to clarifying what the polder model is about. By discussing neo-corporatism, we will gain insight in the workings of the polder model. Schmitter's (1974) definition of neo-corporatism will be taken as a guideline. The definition and use of corporatism varies in different sectors, which as a consequence creates a vague and broad definition of corporatism. In addition, the concept becomes mostly descriptive rather than comparatively analytical.

*'Corporatism as a system of interests and/or attitude representation, a particular model or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state'* (Schmitter 1974: 86).

Neo-corporatism describes a certain degree of co-operation between the parties in government and the relevant socioeconomic interest groups of employers' organizations and trade unions (Woldendorp 2005: 11). These co-operations aim at maintaining or restoring political and social stability by setting economic problems right (Woldendorp 2005: 12; see also Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979; von Alemann 1981; Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982). The expectation is that corporatism changes over time due to the altering context of government and their social partners, in accordance to their interests at the time. The question that needs to be looked at is to which extent corporatism has influenced the polder model as a possible explanation why the polder model changed over time.

### **1.3 Methodology**

For the empirical analysis in this thesis, a content analysis, by means of a document and media analysis, is used in order to get a clear understanding of the governmentality of the polder model. The content analysis provides this research with a summary and a qualitative analysis of relevant messages from the government and the media (Neuendorf 2002: 10). Furthermore, a document analysis on relevant governmental documents was conducted in order to provide background information for the media analysis with an understanding of the 'Werdegang' of the polder model in real world policy practices in the 1990s and 2000s. During this time the polder model was praised for being a system in which many advisory boards, target unions, and interest groups were expected to participate in order to obtain the best result possible (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). However, in 1993, a committee – also known as the De Jong Committee - was instated to give advice on the reduction of these advisory boards (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). In the report *Accustomed Advice*, De Jong Committee argued that all advisory boards should be demobilized with exception of the Council of State (Helderman et al. 2014: 31; Commissie-De Jong 1993). This report went, thus, against the principle of the polder model during its prime years.

The content analysis provides us with possible explanations for the mythologizing and de-mythologizing of the polder model. The mythologizing aspects stay close to the history and the story of the polder model within Dutch society, while the de-mythologizing characteristics move away from this myth and focus on the actual theory and the hardships that come with the model. Furthermore, the media analysis enabled us to get a clear view of various opinions from different politically colored newspapers from 2009 until 2016. Not only has the polder model been celebrated, but it has also been crushed. This research is of relevance because it can clarify the governmentality of the polder model on the Dutch identity, society and public administration.

### **1.4 Outline of the Thesis**

In chapter two the various theories are discussed that can explain the governmentality of the polder

model in the Netherlands. The relation between the various theories and the variables that link these theories are discussed. In chapter three a more elaborate explanation of the methodology of the content analysis is provided. Chapter four discusses the polder model in the Netherlands in the 1990s and 2000s. In chapter five the newspaper articles are reviewed and analyzed, followed by the results of my findings.

## Chapter 2: Governmentality of the Polder Model: A Theoretical Approach

As discussed in chapter 1, the polder model seems to be firmly rooted in Dutch governance and society, but even so it cannot be considered a political sociological theory. In this chapter the way of thinking about the polder model is discussed using the theory of governmentality, and how this governmentality is constituted by political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism. Much of the *Werdegang* of the polder model can be explained by neo-corporatism, but as explained in the previous chapter, the polder model goes beyond corporatism. The polder model in fact stands for the Dutch governmentality and its meaning goes far beyond the formal and informal negotiations between the government and well-organized socio-economic actors. A thought or a way of thinking can be influenced by external factors. For the polder model these external factors can be clarified by the concepts of political myth and collective memory. This chapter will give an overview and explanation of these concepts, and how these theories relate to each other and the polder model.

### 2.1 Governmentality

Since the governmentality of the polder model is examined in this study, it is important to look at the theory of governmentality itself. Towards the end of his life, French philosopher Michel Foucault developed a theory on government, describing it as the 'conduct of conduct', from which the concept of the governmentality of government evolved (Dean 2010: 17; Foucault 1982: 220-1). According to Mitchell Dean (2010), 'conduct' can have different meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the verb 'to conduct', which entails to lead, to direct, to guide, or the process of getting somewhere. On the other hand, 'conduct' can be a noun, addressing our behavior and our way of working (Dean 2010: 17). By putting these different types of the meaning of conduct together, Dean (2010: 18) formulates the following definition for government as the 'conduct of conduct':

*'Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a divers set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.'*

This definition and research on governments bring forward two implications. Firstly, researching government is fascinating not only because governing refers to regulating people, actions, or opinion, but also because government endeavors to confer about and guide 'human conduct' (Dean 2010: 18). This implicates that human conduct is rational and variable, since it can be changed, directed, and monitored. This leads us to the second implication, namely the concept 'rational' that addresses the fact that any

form of rationality is applied to the idea of how to govern (Dean 2010: 18). For the Dutch case, it is important to note that the government is concerned with shaping human conduct in a *liberal* sense (e.g. Foucault 2008: 60-70). This means that those who are governed can act and think freely.

According to Dean (2010: 24), the actual concept of governmentality ‘deals with how we think about governing, with the different mentalities of government. [...] Thinking here is a collective activity. It is not a matter of the representations of individual mind or consciousness, but of the bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion in which we are immersed’. These mentalities (of government) are collective, and can be defined as a composition of ideas and these thoughts cannot always be susceptiblely grasped by the thinker. This type of self-government can be put into four categories (Foucault 1985; 1986a; 1986b). The first self-governed aspect is the *governed or ethical substance*, which regards what we ontologically search to act upon (Dean 2010: 26). Secondly, this type of self-government deals with the ascetics of how we govern the governed or ethical substance (Dean 2010: 26). This is also called *governing or ethical work*. The third type of self-government involves who we are when we are governed in this manner. This type refers to the *governable or ethical subject* (Dean 2010: 27). Lastly, this type of self-government is concerned with the teleology of the ethical government of self, i.e. why we govern or are governed, what is the goal or what do we want to achieve. This is also called the *telos of governmental or ethical practices* (Dean 2010: 27). In sum, the way we deal with government is manifold and divers as a result of different kinds of actions and power, and the exertion of different kinds of thoughts (Dean 2010: 27).

As discussed above, thought and governmentality have a certain relationship, but according to Foucault there is another meaning to the understanding of governmentality. Here, the notion of governmentality refers to the upcoming of a new way of thinking about and exercising authority in certain societies (Foucault 1991a: 102-4; Dean 2010: 28). Foucault (1991a: 102-3) identifies four characteristics of governmentality. First, government overlooks the wellbeing of a population on one side; and on the other side, government must be economic (Foucault 1977; Dean 2010: 28). It is of importance to govern in an economic manner in order to achieve a certain wellbeing of the population (Dean 2010: 29). Second, sovereignty and discipline go hand in hand with the notion of governmentality (Dean 2010: 29). Sovereignty and discipline define the territory in which governmentality works – sovereignty ensures the exercise of power over a population within a fixed territory and discipline ensures the control and arranging of the population within that territory (Dean 2010: 29). Third, governmentality contains those institutions that maintain, defend and secure the national population, which are also known as apparatuses of security (Dean 2010: 29). Examples of these institutions are armies, police forces, intelligence services, but also health, education, social welfare systems and the management of the economy. Fourth, governmentality refers to bio-politics as Foucault calls it. This entails ‘the long process

by which the juridical and administrative apparatuses of the state come to incorporate the disparate arenas of rule concerned with this government of the population' (Dean 2010: 30). Foucault also describes this as being the 'governmentalization of the state' (Dean 2010: 30).

What Foucault refers to as *bio-politics* can also be termed as an *analytics of government* (Dean 2010: 30). Dean (2010: 30) describes *analytics* as a kind of study that deals with an analysis of particular circumstances under which specific entities appear, happen and alter. Thus, the circumstances under which regimes of practices show up, exist and change are researched. These regimes of practices are the institutional routines and rituals – i.e. ways of doing particular things in specific places and at certain times (Dean 2010: 31). The analytics of governments aim at defining the way of doing things and how we think and ask questions about governing. It, hence, tries to determine the upcoming of a particular regime, to research the manner in which it is formed, and to track the various processes and connections that constitute a regime into particular organizations and institutional practice (Dean 2010: 31). Within a certain society, there can be various number of interconnected and –related regimes of practices. In short, '[a]n analytics of government will seek to constitute the intrinsic logic or *strategy* of a regime of practices that cannot be simply read off particular programs, theories and policies of reform' (Dean 2010: 32).

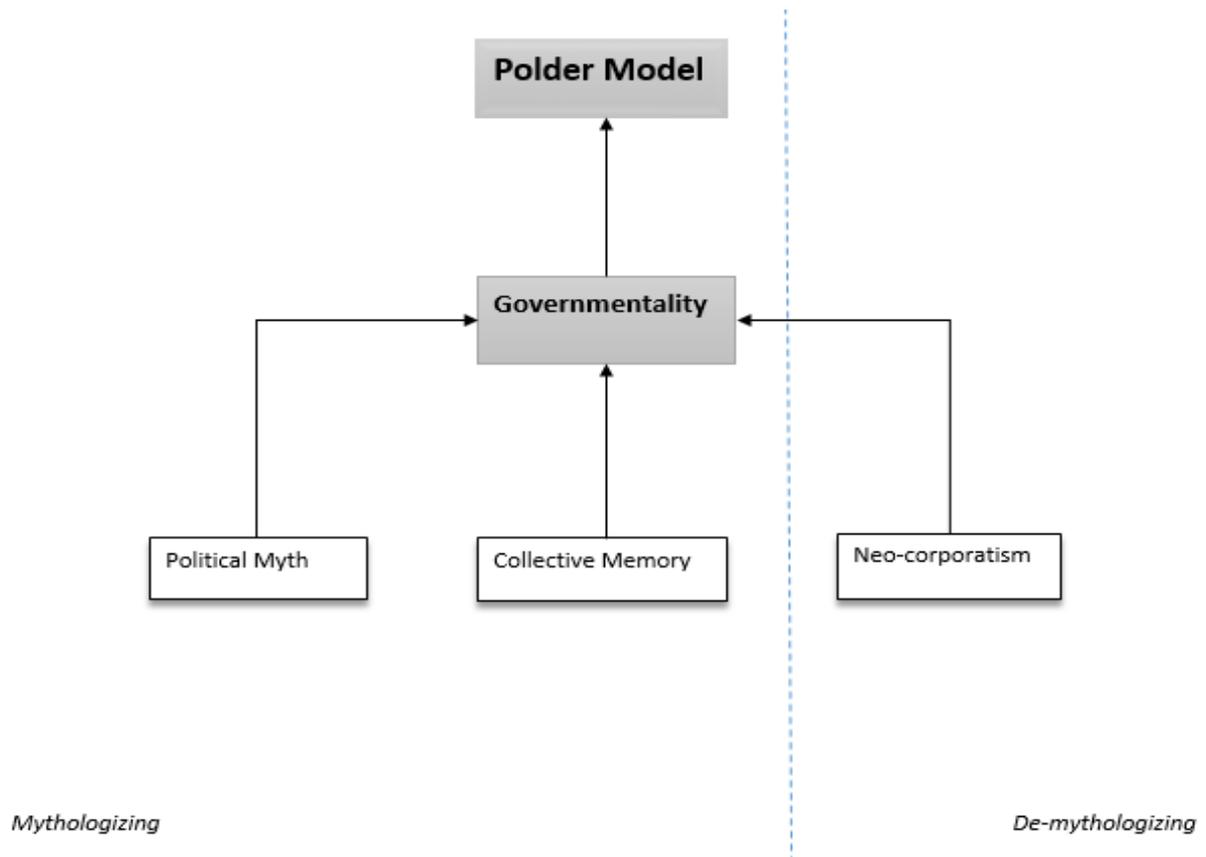
In this research an analytics of government is done by looking at the various regimes of practice that are linked to the polder model. In order to analyze a regime of practice, it is necessary to look at how these changes are problematized within government. Dean (2010: 38) explains that '[a] problematization of government is a calling into question of how we shape or direct our own and others' conduct. Problematizations might thus equally concern how we conduct government and how we govern conduct'. In short, problematizations are capable of pinpointing why and how government is shaped or changed by both governmental and non-governmental actors.

In conclusion, governmentality refers to the manner in which we think we are and want to be governed. Thought and governmentality hold a special relationship, but there is also an important relation between governmentality and authority. Authority holds close relations to sovereignty and discipline (Dean 2010: 29). Dean (2010: 29) explains that 'it concerns the exercise of power over and through the individual, the body and its forces and capacities, and the composition of aggregates of human individuals (school classes, armies, etc.)'. The manner in which this authority and its governmentality works, can be explained by the theories that make up governmentality: political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism. These theories are formed or altered by the problematizations of government.

As shortly explained above, the discussion of Foucault's governmentality is of importance in order to make a relation between the de-mythologizing and the mythologizing of the polder model. For this study

governmentality is used as a variable acting dependently on the theories of political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism (see Figure 1). Firstly, governmentality is connected to the theory of political myth. Governmentality discusses how people think they want to be governed and how others should be governed. These thoughts can be influenced by a political myth, or they can create a re-appropriated political myth. A political myth can induce a type of governmentality, but it can also be influenced by it. The four characteristics Foucault ascribes to governmentality entail the arena in which a political myth functions. A political myth works for governments, and their institutions, of a nation of people in a certain territory, who are concerned with the wellbeing of their population. The expectation is that when these various parties are often at an impasse that the mythologizing of the polder model will decrease, since the aforesaid system appears not be working properly. Secondly, governmentality is contingent on the theory of collective memory, since particular memories and formed identities can influence the way in which people perceive and think about the government and governance. Thirdly, in contrast to the other theories, neo-corporatism is capable of explaining the working of the polder model and its governmentality. This is because governmentality can explain why a society thinks that a neo-corporatist governance style fits them or not. The idea is that a positive outlook on the use of advisory boards and interest groups, increases the neo-corporatist, de-mythologizing nature of the Dutch political system and, therefore, enhances the polder model's idea of consultation, harmony and consensus.

Figure 1: Conceptual Scheme of Theories



## 2.2 Political Myth

All groups of people tell stories, or myths. They do this to explain the beginning of a city, culture, race or an idea. Some of these narratives can also be identified as 'origin myths', or 'histories of foundation'. Occasionally it is unclear whether a story is true or false: the line between it being history or a myth is crossed. The blurring of this distinction makes a myth even more unattainable and the more effective. According to Bruce Lincoln (2014: 1), the state is in most need of such an imposing tale, 'particularly as it tries to legitimate itself and to manage its inevitable tensions and contradictions by naturalizing itself and its operations, while representing its origins as somehow much greater than natural: heroic, miraculous, divinely graced or inspired'. Examples of a state-founding tale are found all over the world, such as the story surrounding ancient Troy in Homer's *Iliad* and Vergil's *Aeneid* which are used to legitimize Europe's existence (Lincoln 2014). The existence and significance of Troy resulted into the emergence of an origin myth of Europe (Rose 2014: 284). Looking at the genealogies of all the heroes in the story, it is remarkable how multidimensional the identities and ethnicities of these characters actually are. According to Rose (2014: 281), most countries in Europe and the Near East have argued to be descendants or have

connections with the old Troy. The *Iliad* has become part of the explanation - or even validation - of Europe's cultural and ethnic heritage and identity. This so-called origin myth has played a significant role in people's existence for many centuries: a myth does not become tradition by virtue of coming into the world, but by being iterated and accepted (Burkert 1979: 2). The label of these myths can also be ascribed to concepts or theories, since the authenticity to which it refers to does not need to be verified (Burkert 1979:3). However, these types of myths describe an ancient city in ancient times. In the next section, the political myth is thus discussed to make a connection with contemporary times.

When thinking about myths, we normally think about stories, consisting of a religious and a political backdrop, told in ancient times, which are not relevant for the people of today. However, more recently a new line of studies has been done on myths in modern societies. As brought forward by Bottici and Challand (2006: 315), myths have not disappeared from modern politics.

There is not an extensive list of theoretical frameworks on myths, but for this study I use Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand's (2004) theory on political myths to explain how stories can be used to benefit certain political ambitions. They argue that political myths are not vastly discussed in academic discourse because the political role of a myth has only been acknowledged in ancient societies (Bottici & Challand 2004: 317). While in ancient societies a distinction between the religious and political role of a myth could barely be distinguished, in modern societies the myths tend to be solely politically based – this is because of the segregation of politics from religion, and the increasing influence of democracy (Bottici & Challand 2004: 317). On the other hand, political myths are intrinsically very particular, which causes them to operate in specific occasions (Bottici & Challand 2004: 317). What this means is that a political myth can vary in meaning or significance for certain people in particular circumstances – the contents can stay the same but the people vary, and vice versa. This also proposes that a myth is specifically *political* due to a particular content, and that it relates to a given narrative and the way it aims at the specific political content of a group of people (Bottici & Challand 2004: 317). This presumption can explain why it has been so difficult to make a general theory of political myths.

In order to get to a full understanding of the working of a myth, I use Blumenberg's (1985) theory on the 'work of myth' to examine what provokes an intrinsically particularistic myth. Blumenberg (1985) states that myths are always changing with the circumstances they are in – there is never one original version. Working with a myth originates from the human's desire of *Bedeutsamkeit* (significance) that changes with the time's circumstances. And each time the myth changes due to its context, the narrative gets re-appropriated (also called *Umbesetzung*) to fit the time (Blumenberg 1985). One can argue that this ever evolving nature of a myth is due to the need to explain the significance of a situation to a certain group in a particular time (Bottici & Challand 2004: 318). When the world changes, so does the myth. The

significance, or *Bedeutsamkeit*, is of great importance, because according to Blumenberg (1985: 1, 3) *Bedeutsamkeit* is understood as a defense against the indifference of the world. People do not want the world to be indifferent to themselves. This significance covers the space in which religion – i.e. the meaning of life and death – and a scientific theory – i.e. simple meaning – cannot operate. In this space the myth does its work (Blumenberg 1985; Bottici & Challand 2004: 318). On the other hand, humans need relief (*Entlastung*) from the surplus of incentives that they are exposed to due to the inability to conform to a particular environment (Bottici & Challand 2004: 319). Myths provide humans a way to cope with their circumstances by giving meaning to their situation. It is important to note that this changing and re-appropriation of the myth is closely linked to the altering of a regime of practice.

While Blumenberg (1985) based his analysis on literary myths, politics are found in the background of his story. His theory can also be applied to the political aspect of the myths, since the political myth changes intrinsically with the particular circumstances in time (Bottici & Challand 2004: 319). When the circumstances change so much that no significance can be given to it, the political myth ceases to exist or can be re-appropriated to fit the new context. As defined by Bottici and Challand (2004: 320) ‘a political myth can be defined as the work on a common narrative, which provides significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group’. Not the content nor the claim to truth makes a narrative a political myth, but (1) that it (re)creates significance; (2) that it is part of a given group; and (3) that it can refer to the particular political situation in which a group exists (Bottici & Challand 2004: 320).

In order to indicate whether something can be seen as a political myth, it is of importance to look at what constitutes the ‘working of a myth’ – this being production, reception and reproduction. Therefore, one must look at the production of the narrative, but even more at the reception. The way how people look at the myth constitutes its significance, and whether the narrative needs to be reproduced (Bottici & Challand 2004: 320). This is the reason for doing a media analysis in this study. The working of a myth can be found in many different settings, such as speech, art, rituals and social practices: the usage of a myth is pervasive as a consequence of the mediatization of politics (Bottici & Challand 2004: 320). Due to this pervasiveness ‘political myths can come to deeply influence our basic and most fundamental perceptions of the world and thus escape the possibility of critical scrutiny. Political myths are not only what we perceive about the world of politics, but also the lenses which we perceive it’ (Bottici & Challand 2004: 320-321).

The question that should be asked next is how the polder model fits within the description of a political myth. This particular political myth can be explained by looking at how the polder model received its name. As discussed in the previous chapter, polders play a significant role in Dutch society – not only do they make sure that the Dutch people keep their feet dry, it also symbolizes the superiority of the

Dutch in their battle against water and the recovering of land (Bos 2007: 22). Due to the battle against water the Netherlands has become known as an egalitarian society in which people from all stages of life work together to keep their lives going (Andeweg 2000: 698; Bos 2007: 22). The battle against water is not only seen in politics, but also in art or children stories telling of the rough seas, the breaking through of dikes, and showing the natural or manmade landscape of the Dutch polders. Going back to the polder model, the model itself is not necessarily the political myth, but more the outcome of changing circumstances and a way to re-appropriate (*Umbesetzung*) the significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of this myth. The polder model is based on the assumption that the Dutch have always worked together to obtain a certain end result – this also being true in politics. As a consequence of various crises in the 1970s and 1980s economic and political times had changed: politics needed to be rebooted, giving space for the working of a myth and creating the polder model. While in the ancient myths the *homo magus* or *homo divinans* would remedy all the wickedness in the world, this role has been taken over by politicians in more modern times. Like the gods, the politicians ‘not only promise to cure all social evils, but also continually foretell the future’ (Cassirer 1973: 288f; Bottici & Challand 2004: 321). For the polder model, the position of *homo magus* can be given to Wim Kok, the social democratic Prime Minister of the Netherlands. He did not invent the term of the polder model, but he was seen as the face of the myth nationally and internationally (Bos 2007: 15).

In short, political myths bridge the gap between narratives in ancient and modern times. These types of myth are ever changing: when a certain narrative does not fit within the given context, the myth is altered and re-appropriated. This altering and re-appropriation is closely linked to the regimes of practice. These myths can be embedded in society to such an extent that they become part of a person’s environment and identity. When this occurs for a group of people, these ideas and thoughts then become collective memories and identities.

### **2.3 Collective Memory and Identities**

In the late 1940s French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs created the concept of collective memory as a *strategic political process* for the establishment of ideas and social norms (Rothstein 2000: 493). Halbwachs (1941: 7) argued that ‘collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past [that] adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present’ (see also Schwartz 1991: 221). Important to note is that the individuals within a particular group, not the group itself, support a common memory (Rothstein 2005: 160). The collective memory symbolizes an image of past events that have been shared by the individuals in the social group (Rothstein 2005: 160). A collective memory can, thus, be found on the group level, but also on the individual level since the individuals in the group carry

that particular memory (Rothstein 2005: 160).

The advantage of this collective memory theory is that the memories of a given group are not inescapable parts of the past, but they are mostly the product of purposeful and tactical actions by political actors (Rothstein 2005: 161). According to Halbwachs (1941), collective memories are not established because it is part of 'history' or because the present society is in need of a particular social construction of the past (Rothstein 2000: 494). Instead, collective memories are the purposeful creations of strategically acting political entrepreneurs who use these ideas or social norms to promote their political aims and ambitions (Rothstein 2000: 494). Different political actors can claim their specific interpretation of the past as being *the* collective memory of a specific group or society (Rothstein 2000: 494).

The difficulty with studying collective memory is how societies and groups remember their pasts (Rothstein 2005: 162). This has to do with the word 'remember', since it should entail broad interpretations that covers a wide range of how people honor certain historical events through memorials such as museums, statues and publications, and how these phenomena are celebrated (Rothstein 2005: 162). This also includes the memories that are based on their own experiences or as traditions handed down from previous generations (Rothstein 2005: 162). Two research types are based on the theory of collective memory: a relativist approach and a functionalist approach. The first approach argues that history is constructed by the need for legitimizing the elites' rule (Rothstein 2005: 162). The relativist approach states that there is *discontinuity* between the past and the present. It goes even further by saying that a past does not exist but is the one that is created for us by the governing elites (Rothstein 2005: 162; also Schwartz 1991). The functionalist approach states that the present is created by what happened in the past, creating a *continuity* between the past and the present (Rothstein 2005: 162). In essence, the present is the memory of the past, which cannot be altered by the elites in power (Rothstein 2005: 162).

These memories are the basis of what creates ideals, preferences and identities. A person is capable of facilitating many different identities, and of giving meaning to those different identities (March & Olsen 1995: 49). Political identities are created once individuals come in contact with certain historical and political experiences and conditions (March & Olsen 1995: 49). This can be done by social movements, economic transformations, war, and migration (March & Olsen 1995: 49), but this can also be done through their collective memories. As Halbwachs (1941) argued, memories are not formed in the past, but they are creations of the present by strategic political entrepreneurs who are aiming to promote their political views and ambitions.

The purpose of combining collective memory with the polder model is to grasp how political

identities are being formed. This study appears to be leaning towards a functionalist approach given Rothstein's explanation of collective memories. This means that the polder model appears to be story inherited from the past and subsequently used by a political elite, rather than it being a creation of these political actors. People have always wanted to know who they are, where they come from, and how to explain unexplainable aspects of their lives (March & Olsen 1995: 49). To understand how these political identities are formed, and how people identify themselves is of importance to grasp the significance of the governmentality of the polder model. The polder model is assumed to refer to the continual battle against water – a situation of life that has affected the Dutch society as whole, creating a communal affiliation with the polder model and, thus, making it part of the identity of the Dutch people. This sense of an egalitarian society is part of the collective memory. The assumption is that whether people feel positively or negatively about the polder model depends on the degree to which they associate the polder model to be part of their identity. This positive or negative opinion results in the position and responses of actors towards the polder model.

In conclusion, collective memories are presented as events and specific moments of a group in the past to represent the context of a group in the present and future. These collective memories contain the characteristic of being part of a political process in order to establish norms and ideas.

#### **2.4 Neo-corporatism**

Political myth and collective memory explain the mythologizing aspects of the governmentality of the polder model in that it describes the thoughts and meaning attached to the polder model, but not the *Werdegang* of it in real world governance situations. The best candidate for getting an understanding of the polder model as a real world governance arrangement (with its positive and negative sides) is the theory of neo-corporatism. Whereas political myth and collective memory contribute to the mythologizing aspects of the polder model, neo-corporatism should help us to explain the de-mythologizing aspects of the polder model. These de-mythologizing characteristics can be seen in the concepts of corporatist immobility and disengagement; the decision deadlocks that come along with corporatist actor constellations in times of crises and conflict, and the dismantling of corporatist institutions. While the polder model is often associated with harmony and consensus, neo-corporatist theory has also emphasized the dark side of corporatist interest mobilization and intermediation.

In the 1970s Schmitter (1974: 86) defined '[c]orporatism as a system of interests and/or attitude representation, a particular model or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state'. Corporatism was seen as an alternative explanation of political life, differing from the in the North-America dominated concept

pluralism (Schmitter 1974: 95). Both pluralism and corporatism identify, accept and try to handle increasing structural differentiation and the diversity in interest of modern political life, yet they solve the problem in opposing ways and have an opposite take on how the modern polity works (Schmitter 1974: 97). Furthermore, Lehbruch (1977, 1979) argued that deliberation plays a central role in neo-corporatist policy-making (Molina & Rhodes 2005: 307). Schmitter (1974) and Lehbruch (1977, 1979) were the first to identify the transition from old corporatism to modern or neo-corporatism (Molina & Rhodes 2005: 307). The main difference between corporatism and neo-corporatism lies in the continuous and arranged role of functional interest groups in the policy-making process within a given sector (Molina & Rhodes 2005: 307; Schmitter 1974: 91). In short, neo-corporatism is regarded as the modern form of corporatism that came up in the 1970s and 1980s. Neo-corporatism emphasizes the important role of concertation and the functional interest associations during the policy-making process (Schmitter 1974; Lehbruch 1977, 1979; Molina & Rhodes 2005).

Debates and research on neo-corporatism in the 1970s and 1980s acquired neo-corporatism as the name of social science model. It was, thus, seen as an approach to research corporatist political phenomena across different countries over various time periods (Molina & Rhodes 2005: 307). Woldendorp (2005: 11) argued that ‘neo-corporatism means a certain measure of co-operation between party government and the relevant socioeconomic interest groups of employers’ organizations and trade unions. The aim of this “organized” co-operation is to redress the economic problems in such a way that social and political stability is maintained or restored’ (Woldendorp 2005: 11-12; see also Schmitter and Lehbruch 1979; von Alemann 1981; Lehbruch and Schmitter 1982). Neo-corporatism influences the macroeconomic performances of market economies in terms of increasing economic growth, lower inflation, and less unemployment (Woldendorp 2005: 12). This is clearly seen in comparison with non-neo-corporatist democracies. The idea that neo-corporatism facilitates the co-operation between party government and relevant socioeconomic interest groups is important for our understanding of the polder model and its governmentality, since this theory explains the working of the model itself. Consensus, harmony and consultation are certainly key elements of these co-operations between the various parties, but corporatism does not always result in harmony and consensus.

In the past, corporatist theory has been unilaterally focused on the invariable societal-organizational and political-administrative aspects of nation states (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 101). Visser and Hemerijck (1997: 101) question this statement, because the corporatist policy is not static, and subject of negative and positive feedback. Helderma et al. (2014: 14) comment on this as follows ‘[w]ithin the corporatist domain one can speak of a complex exchange relationship between organized interests and the government, and which is best typified as “generalized political exchange” between a

democratically chosen government and organized, non-affiliated, particular interests'. A corporatist exchange relationship is a success when the actions and strategies of actors, involved in the exchange, are relatively predictable (Helderman et al. 2014: 14). In order to illustrate this dynamic relation between corporatist policy, and relevant institutions and actors, Visser and Hemerijck (1997) provide a conceptual framework of four stages of corporatism. Corporatist policy varies in two aspects: 1) the degree of institutional integration of interest in the policy-making process, and 2) the degree of societal support for corporatist policy in the relevant interest associations (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 102). Institutional

**Figure 2: Four Stages of Corporatist Policy (Helderman et al. 2014: 15; Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106)**

		<i>Degree of Societal Support</i>	
		Low	High
<i>Degree of Institutional Integration</i>	High	<b>Immobile Corporatism</b>	<b>Responsive Corporatism</b>
	Low	<b>Corporatist Disengagement</b>	<b>Innovative Corporatism</b>

integration refers to the idea that the policy-making process is positively influenced when interest groups are directly involved (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 102). Societal support, on the other hand, addresses the effectiveness of policy when it is supported by actors within and between relevant organizations (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 102). The four types that can be identified when taking the degree of institutional integration and societal support into consideration are: innovative corporatism, responsive corporatism, immobile corporatism, and corporatist disengagement (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106-111; see Figure 2). Firstly, the government and the social relations recognize that they are both dependent on one another in realizing their goals. Conflicting situations must be overcome relatively easily in places where opinions and interests are surmountable, which surpasses in *innovative corporatism* (Helderman et al. 2014: 15; Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106). This type of corporatism heightens the level of institutional integration between the actors and their accountability. All parties work best together when the societal support is immense for the discussed policy (Helderman et al. 2014: 15; Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106). Secondly, it is also possible that not all views line up, but that this can be overcome by consultation and negotiation. It is much easier to accomplish this type of *responsive corporatism* when each party can cover the (compensation) costs, than when a party does not have the funds to do so (Helderman et al. 2014: 15;

Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106). Thirdly, as disparity in interests and disagreements increase, societal support for corporatist negotiations decrease. The reason why negotiations do not crumble is because of the high level of corporate engagement and institutional integration. The situation turns into a stand-off, a decision-making impasse, or deadlock (Helderman et al. 2014: 15; Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 106). This is also known as *immobile corporatism*. Fourthly, if this deadlock drags on for too long, or if a solution cannot be found, the government can intervene (Helderman et al. 2014: 15). The government can realize this by taking the role of a mediator, by controlling the negotiations, penetrating the institutional integration, and replacing the responsibility for the policy with another actor or themselves. This is also called *corporatist disengagement* (Helderman et al. 2014: 15). So the mythologizing part is mainly about innovative and responsive corporatism, while the socio-political theory of neo-corporatism also acknowledges the fact that corporatism (the polder model) may lead to decision deadlocks: immobile corporatism.

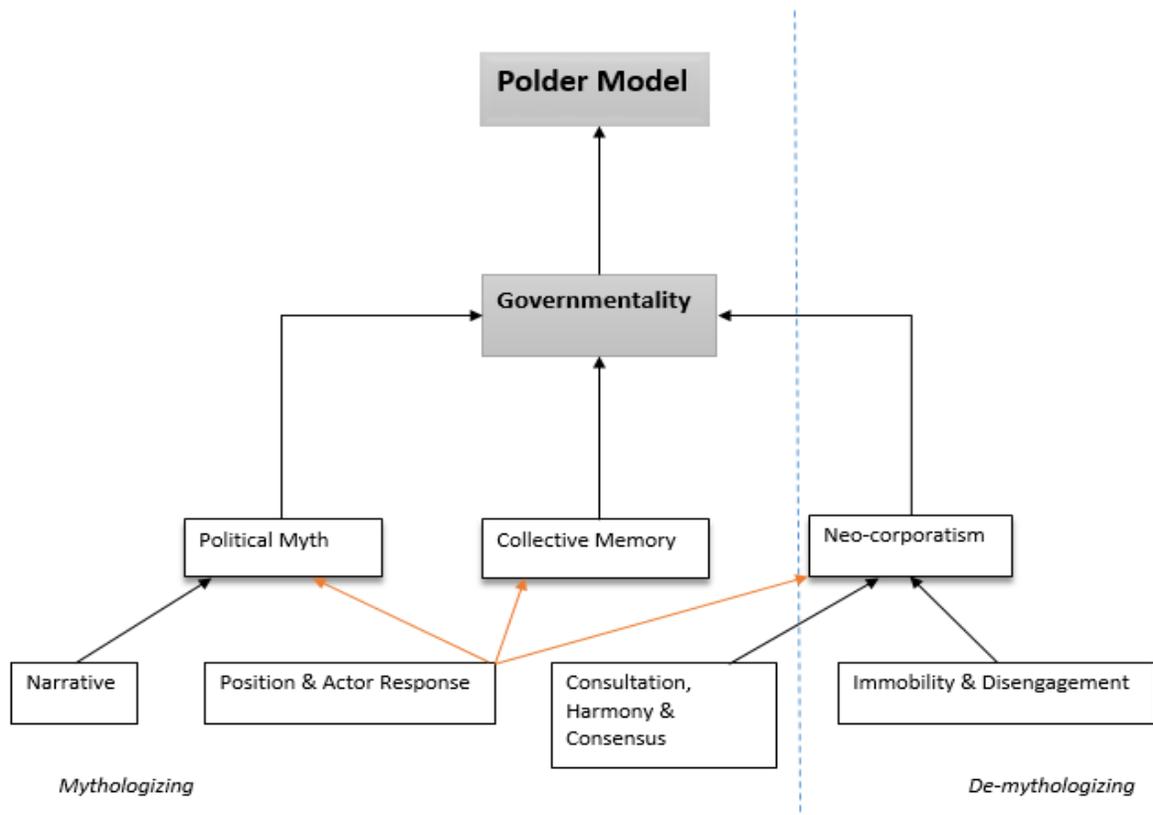
In short, corporatist policy-making is not a static process between relevant political institutions and interest associations. According to Visser & Hemerijck (1997) corporatist policy undergoes four different stages in the policy-making process. These phases can provide an explanation of the varying attitudes towards the neo-corporatist polder model and, thus, defining its governmentality. This is expected to be seen in the position of an actor and its response towards the polder model. With position is meant the actor's positive or negative point of view towards (the working of) the polder model. Actor response refers to the manner in which actors talk about the polder model. The neo-corporatist influence on the polder model is most likely seen when the various parties are at an impasse, and whether the government will intervene to solve the issue. The assumption is this framework can aid in clarifying the fluctuation of positive and negative attitudes towards the polder model, and the (in)ability to overcome a deadlock.

## **2.5 Problematizing the Polder Model**

Governmentality is, thus, influenced and directed by the three mechanisms of political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism. These theories operate within various policy arenas and sector throughout Dutch society. They can explain the position and response of actors towards the polder model; the use of particular narratives that concern the neo-corporatist system; the idea of harmony, consensus and consultation; and the (in)ability of actors to overcome an impasse with or without interference by the government. These various regimes of government and its 'conduct of conduct' can be researched by means of 'problematization'. This idea of problematization can aid in analyzing the governmentality of the polder model and the key elements that constitute it (Figure 2).

As shown in Figure 2 various problematizations were added to help in defining the governmentality of the polder model in the Netherlands. As seen in the scheme there is a division between mythologizing and de-mythologizing characteristics of the polder model. The de-mythologizing aspects are defined by the theory of neo-corporatism. This theory is closely related to the immobility between actors and the interference by the government. This, thus, represents immobile corporatism and corporatist disengagement. According to Hemerijck and Visser (1997) these two stages of corporatism are followed by innovative and responsive corporatism. In the scheme this is represented by the mythologizing elements of the polder model. Various problematizations are brought forward. First, narrative is closely related to political myth, and explains the content and use of a myth in Dutch society. Second, the variables position and actor response are connected to all of the described theories in that they explain the way actors in politics and society think about the polder model. This is part of the mythologizing aspects of the model, because these attitudes and responses on the polder model are mostly based on experiences, ideologies, traditions and past memories. The idea is that when actors respond positively about the polder model, the system works better: there are less deadlocks and less need for disengagement. Positive attitudes thus affect the increasing use of a myth or a particular memory of a particular governance style. Third, the variables consensus, harmony and consultation are together part of the mythologizing spectrum, but are closely related to the theory of neo-corporatism. When consensus, harmony and consultation is successful, there is more innovative and responsive corporatism and thus increasing the mythologizing aspects of the model.

Figure 2: Conceptual Scheme including Problematizations



## 2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the various theories that constitute governmentality have been discussed. First, governmentality discusses the manner in which we think about governing (Dean 1999). These thoughts are a collective action of a group of people. This relates closely to appropriation of a political myth. Second, the political myth describes the narrative around a political process that gives meaning and significance to a particular event or situation by a group of people (Bottici & Challand 2004). In contrast to founding myths, a political myth is capable of explaining more contemporary circumstance or political processes. This is because the myth is continuously reproduced to fit within a given context (Bottici & Challand 2004). Third, the concept of collective memory is based on the idea of collective action. Collective memory is used as a political process for the establishment of ideas and social norms (Rothstein 2000). It is possible that a political myth can become collective memory when a group of people appropriate it as being part of their past and identity. Fourth, neo-corporatism refers to the idea that government co-operates with relevant socioeconomic interest groups to deliberate about certain societal issues. While the concepts of political myth and collective memory describe the mythologizing aspects of the governmentality of the

polder model, the theory of neo-corporatism can be used as a way of explaining the working of the polder model's *Werdegang*.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

How can we empirically investigate the governmentality of the polder model? Research on the polder model is intricate, since the polder model is difficult to grasp and cannot stand on its own as a model or theory. To understand the governmentality of the polder model, it is necessary to conduct a content analysis by means of a media analysis. Through the content analysis it is possible to describe and explain the opinions of important political actors, what causes are ascribed to the positive and negative functioning of the polder model, and the various attitudes of these actors towards the model. In order to understand the various theories and their interrelatedness, it is of importance to select particular variables that are capable of explaining the discussed theories in relation to the polder model – i.e. regimes of practice. Finding and defining these various regimes of practice is done through problem definitions. Problem definitions are characterized as the process of defining problems within the political arena (Rocheftort & Cobb 1994: 3-4; Stone 2001). The following question is observed: *How can the significance of the governmentality of the polder model be researched?* This question can be answered by considering the various problematizations of a group of actors through the use of problem definitions. I start off with explaining the theories of David Rocheftort and Roger Cobb (1994), and Deborah Stone (2001) on various explanations of problem definitions. Furthermore, the problem definitions that are selected for this study are discussed. Finally, important political actors, who contributed to the existence or demise of the polder model, are selected and examined.

### 3.1 Conceptualization

For this study the issues are centered on the concepts of the governmentality and the polder model in Dutch society and governance. The media is used as source to see how actors think and express themselves about the polder model in order to get a sense of the meaning of the polder model for Dutch public administration. Variables help with defining and measuring concepts that vary due to its distinct value in specific context (Neuendorf 2002: 95). For a content analysis, problem definitions are formulated in order to develop a code book using a quantitative procedure. While the coding scheme is set up for a quantitative research analysis, the coding and analysis for this thesis is done through a qualitative research analysis.

The selection of the content analysis variables was conducted by reviewing the elements of the issues that are crucial for understanding said concepts in selected Dutch newspapers (Neuendorf 2002: 95-96). The problem definitions are particular facets of the various discussed theories that constitute governmentality. For the empirical section several universal variables were used. These include the policy arena, sector, actor response and position. The remaining variables were chosen on basis of their

connection to the workings of governmentality and the polder model. As discussed in chapter 2, various theories contribute to explaining the thoughts around the polder model: political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism. The political myth and collective memory theories aided with the selection of the particular variables. The variables that describe these theories and their relation to the polder model are consensus, harmony, deliberation, and narrative. The actual working of the polder model is made clear by the theory of neo-corporatism. The variables that are connected with this theory are immobility and disengagement. Below a further explanation of the selected variables is provided:

*Policy Arena.* A political arena can be identified as ‘a sphere of interest, interest or competition’ (Merriam-Webster.com 2016). The policymaking process can be found within a particular political arena. The venue of a certain policy can change when relevant political actors or interest groups decide to move the issues to a new arena (Pralle 2006: 171). For this analysis it is important to note which particular policy arena is discussed in the newspaper articles. This can aid in understanding in which arena the polder model is discussed.

*Sector.* Sector is defined as ‘a part or branch of an economy, or of particular industry or activity’ (OED online 2016). For this variable the particular industry, activity, or economy is established. This is of importance to consider which part or branch of society refers to the polder model, and what the attitude is towards the model. It is, therefore, possible that the sector can range from national to local institutions.

*Actor Response.* Actor response refers to the response of the actors given on a specific topic. This variable is closely linked to the next variable *position*, yet differs in that it does not look at the negative or positive opinion of an actor but rather regards the manner in which the actor looks at the functioning of the polder model.

*Position.* Position refers to ‘a proposition or thesis laid down or stated; something posited; a statement, an assertion; a tenet, a belief, opinion’ (OED Online 2016). This variable distinguishes the positive and negative attitudes towards to the polder model. The assumption is that a reference to success of the polder model refers to the willingness to work with the polder model, and that ill-success or failure refers to the need or want to abandon the model.

*Consensus.* Consensus means an ‘agreement in opinion; the collective unanimous opinion of a number of persons’ (OED Online 2016). Consensus is one of the key elements of the polder model, which makes the model a success. Consensus between the relevant actors and organizations forms the basis for the model.

*Harmony.* Harmony is another core element of the polder model that describes the ‘combination or adaptation of parts, elements, or related things, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole; agreement, accord, congruity’ (OED Online 2016). In comparison to consensus, agreement between various parties plays a central role.

*Consultation.* The third key aspect of the polder model is consultation, in which ‘the action of consulting or taking counsel together; deliberation, conference’ (OED Online 2016). Consultation is important due to the element of various relevant actors and organizations coming together to comply with one another and, thus, creating harmony between the various parties. Not only is this variable of importance for the explaining the polder model but also for the theory of neo-corporatism in which consultation or advisement plays a central role.

*Narrative.* Narrative is defined as follows: ‘in structuralist and post-structuralist theory: a representation of a history, biography, process, etc., in which a sequence of events has been constructed into a story in accordance with a particular ideology; esp. in grand narrative *n.* [...] a story or representation used to give an explanatory or justificatory account of a society, period, etc’ (OED Online 2016). This variable refers to the myth surrounding the polder model, in which the significance of the polders and the battle against water is told. This narrative also refers to the theories of political myths and collective memory.

*Immobility.* The first neo-corporatist phase is immobile corporatism. Immobility refers to ‘the quality or condition of being immobile; incapacity of moving, or of being moved; fixedness, stability; motionlessness’ (OED Online 2016). When looking at the policymaking process, immobile corporatism regards the impasse or deadlock of relevant actors during their consultations (Visser & Hemerijck 1997). Disengagement is inseparable from immobility.

*Disengagement.* The second neo-corporatist phase is disengagement corporatism (Visser & Hemerijck 1997). Disengagement means ‘the action of disengaging or fact of being disengaged *from* (anything)’ (OED Online 2016). Disengagement occurs when discussing parties are at an impasse, and the government intervenes by replacing actors by other organization or themselves (Visser & Hemerijck 1997).

### **3.2 Operationalization**

For my coding book multiple problem definitions were selected for the content analysis of the media documents on the polder model (discussed in the previous chapter). The newspaper articles were selected from 2009 to 2016 when politics in the Netherlands was politically unstable during the minority

government of Rutte I. ‘Objectively’ speaking there was a crisis, which was seen due to the large number of immobility and disengagement between actors. The question is whether media coverage of the polder model also shows this and whether the myths of the polder model nevertheless maintained. The presumption is that these variables can provide a full overview of the events surrounding the polder model, and the influence of these events within important documents and newspaper articles. In creating a systematic overview of the ideas, concepts and theories of our data, a coding scheme was created to organize these codes. The codes, which are used, are aimed at being exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Neuendorf 2002: 118-119).

Ensuring that the validity and reliability of the research are valid was one of the priorities during the process of operationalizing the variables. Validity is ‘the extent to which a measuring procedure represents the intended, and only the intended, concept’ (Neuendorf 2002: 112). It is, therefore, necessary to think about measuring that we want to be measuring. This was done by adding multiple codes to a particular variable to make the variable exhaustive and mutually exclusive. For this research it was also important to ensure that the internal validity was valid: this was done by matching the conceptual definition and the operationalization (Neuendorf 2002: 107). Reliability, on the other hand, is ‘the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials’ (Neuendorf 2002: 112). It must be possible for the research to be repeated or be done by another person. The reliability for this research was checked by having a second coder carry out a short coding session on randomly picked articles, and comparing the results between the two coders. The level of measurement was done on an ordinal scale in order to maintain a clear arrangement of codes (Neuendorf 2002: 120). A list of the operationalization of the variables is provided in the table (3.1) below:

**Table 3.1 Operationalization of Coding Variables Content Analysis**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Explanation of Variable</i>	<i>Coding</i>
1. Policy Arena	In order to understand in which policy arena the polder model plays a successful role or a failing role it is important to note which arena make use of the model. For the analysis this variable is divided up into 12 units of measurements, each portraying a different policy arena. When the polder model is discussed outside of the governmental sphere the code 0 is used as ‘other’ or ‘unable to determine’.	1. Socio-Economic 2. Political 3. Etc. ... 0 Unable to determine
2. Sector	Since the polder model is used both inside and outside the government, this variable distinguishes the various branches within Dutch society that uses the polder model.	1. Socio-Economic 2. Political 3. Etc. ...

	This variable is measured by 20 units of measurements ranging from 0 through 19.	0 Unable to determine
3. Actor Response	Multiple options are brought forwards when examining the actor response on the polder model. This response varies from overall failure to overall success of the model. Several additional instances are that the polder model worked in the past but does not anymore, and that the polder model works but that it is under pressure.	1. Overall success of the polder model 2. Overall failure of the polder model 3. Polder model used to work but it does not anymore 4. Polder model works but it is under pressure 5. Etc. ... 0 No response
4. Position	To examine the significance of the polder model, it is necessary to note the position or opinions that is taken when talking about the polder model. This variable thus looks at the negative and positive standpoint that is taken by whom in a specific article. The code 0 signifies that the position on the polder model was unable to be determined, while code 1 and 2 represent the positive and negative position. This variable is closely linked to the theory of governmentality in which is argued that people have a specific view on how they want to be governed and how they think they are governed. The variable <i>position</i> is aimed at determining the governmentality of the polder model.	0. neutral 1. negative 2. fairly negative 3. doubting 4. fairly positive 5. positive ... 9. Unable to determine
5. Consensus	In order to grasp whether the application of the polder model was a success or not, consensus needed to be established between the relevant parties. Several possibilities are distinguished varying from no consensus to the establishment of consensus to indirectly remarking on the importance of consensus.	1. consensus was reached between relevant actors 2. consensus was not yet reached/ no consensus 3. Etc. ... 9. Unable to determine
6. Harmony	Another aspect of the polder model is harmony, in which various actors and groups become a coherent whole. The level of measurement is similar to the previous variable. For this variable, 1 signifies that there was harmony between the various parties; 2 refers to the discord between the various actors; and 0 again means that it was not possible to determine.	1. there was harmony amongst actors 2. there was discord between the various actors / no harmony 3. Etc. ... 9. Unable to determine
7. Consultation	The third key element of the polder model is consultation. Like the previous variable consultation is measured on an ordinal scale by coding whether there was or was not consultation between actors. Another possible response is that actors argue that there needs to be consultation. Identifying	1. there was consultation / deliberation between various actors 2. There no consultation / deliberation between various actors 3. Etc.

	which actors are involved in the consultations is done through the unit of analysis <i>actors</i> .	... 9. Unable to determine
8. Narrative	The assumption is that some articles directly refer to the myth of the polder model. This variable, therefore, refers to the whether or not a reference is made to myth and which elements are included in this narrative. The level of measurement ranges from 1 to 4, with code 9 signifying the impossibility to identify a particular reference to a specific narrative.	1. there was no mention of a narrative or myth 2. reference to myth; battle against the water, reclamation of land... 3. Etc. ... 9. Unable to determine
9. Immobility	For this variable a similar division is made regarding the coding of immobility. The used code refers to whether relevant actors were at an impasse with each other concerning a policy issue. In order to get a complete view of this variable, it is necessary to regard whether the article mentions that the impasse or deadlock has been overcome.	1. actors are/were not at an impasse 2. there was a deadlock, but it has been overcome 3. there was a deadlock but it has not been overcome 4. Etc. ... 9. Unable to determine
10. Disengagement	Disengagement refers to the process of the government changing the current political arena by exchanging particular actors by other institutions or interest groups, or themselves. Important to note is that this particular variable is dependent on the variable <i>immobility</i> . This is because without a deadlock or impasse, there is no need for disengagement by the government. In addition, when there is interference by the government it is important to note the specific strategy that was taken to solve the issue.	1. no interference by government to solve issue, yet 2. interference by government without mentioning specific strategy 3. interference by government by ...etc. ... 9. Unable to determine

A more detailed description of the coding of the above discussed variables can be found in the Code Book (Appendix A).

### 3.2.1. Pilot Reliability

In order to check whether the operationalization of the variables was working correctly, a pilot reliability tests was conducted on randomly selected articles. Overall, the variables seemed to be working well. However, some alterations were made to ensure the exclusivity of some variables. First, the variable consensus was changed by adding several codes. Some articles indicated that there was consensus in the past, but that this later failed or disappeared. In addition, some articles indirectly mentioned that there was consensus between the various parties. Second, the variable harmony was not exclusive enough, since multiple articles touched on the concept of harmony without explicitly referring to it. An additional

code was added that described this indirect reference to harmony. Third, the same code was added to the concept of consultation. Finally, a variable *actor response* was added to analysis. This variable indicates the response given on the polder model by an actor. It comes close to the variable position, but it differs from this because it points at the functioning of the polder model itself rather than commenting on whether they favor the model or not.

### **3.3 Unit of Analysis: Actors**

For the unit of analysis I used political and societal actors that are affected or actively participate in the debate on the polder model. A division is made between proponents and opponents of the polder model, trade unions, international actors, actors in the recreational sector, experts, authors of opinion articles and entrepreneurs. As for the proponents of the polder model I selected Wim Kok, the Purple Coalition with the Labor Party (PvdA), the progressive liberals (D66), and the conservative liberals of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Opponents of the polder model are Pim Fortuyn and his party Pim Fortuyn List (LPF), and the right-wing conservative Party for Freedom (PVV). Since trade unions play a very significant role in the upholding of the polder model, several unions were brought forward as units of analysis. In order to get an idea of the actors outside the political and economic sector, it was important to note actors within the recreational sector, academics, artists and entrepreneurs. This shows the large reach the polder model has in Dutch society. An extensive list of the actors can be found in the code book (Appendix A).

### **3.4 Unit of Sampling: Newspapers**

The unit of observation for the empirical section of this thesis are Dutch newspapers that contain the word 'poldermodel' from 2009 until 2016 (Table 3.2). These years were selected since in this period the Netherlands was coming out of an economic crisis, an event by which the polder model is positively and/or negatively influenced. For this analysis 118 documents were consulted, excluding any duplicate articles published in other (subsidiary) newspapers. These articles were found using the database LEXIS/NEXIS, and searching for the Dutch word 'poldermodel'. A risk of only searching this/these particular word(s) is excluding any other articles that indirectly refer to the functioning of polder model but do not specifically use the word (E.g. Visser & Hemerijck 1997). However, the search for finding those particular articles goes beyond the scope of this study. While columns or opinion articles are usually exempted from the selection, since these articles often do not refer to a specific actor and, thus, making it tough to code, I found that these articles refer to the polder model more narratively than other articles. These articles are, therefore, marked with a specific actor code. An overview of the consulted newspapers can be found in the Code Book (Appendix A).

**Table 3.2 Unit of Sampling & Analysis**

Unit of Sampling	The unit of sampling resembles the various newspapers that were selected for the empirical analysis.	1. NRC Handelsblad 2. de Volkskrant 3. het Financieele Dagblad 4. Etc.
Unit of Analysis	The unit of analysis are the actors that are discussed or argue a particular opinion in the newspaper article. A distinction is made between proponents and opponents of the polder model, the various unions and interest groups, professionals, and entrepreneurs.	1. Proponents of the polder model 2. Opponents of the polder model 3. Unions (in general/no distinction made) 3a. CNV 3b. SER 3c. Etc.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In short, for this study a content analysis of Dutch newspaper articles from 2009 to 2016 was done in which the polder model is referred to. The unit of analysis are the actors that are mentioned in the articles and state their opinion on the polder model. The unit of sampling are relevant Dutch newspaper articles. The following variables are selected: policy arena, sector, actor response, position, consensus, harmony, consultation, narrative, immobility, and disengagement. In the next chapter, all articles are coded and analyzed.

## Chapter 4: The Polder Model in Disgrace?

As is discussed in the previous chapter, the perceptions with regards to the polder model vary from being very celebratory to having a displeased connotation. Yet, it is unclear which factors contribute to this fluctuation of attitude towards the corporatist socio-economic policymaking in the Netherlands. In this chapter, an overview of different views of the polder model in the 1990s and 2000s will be given, including a content analysis of particular significant documents regarding the earlier governmentality of the polder model. The selected documents are committee reports – *Customized Advice*, *Advisory System Reform Act* and *the Desert Act* – that alter particular legislation that was connected to the system of the polder model. This chapter therefore serves as background for the content analysis in chapter 5.

### 4.1 The Dutch Consultation Economy

At first glance, the polder model did not seem self-evident. The Purple Cabinet<sup>3</sup>, which was assembled in 1994, had intended to break through the existing corporatist structures (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 31-32; Bos et al. 2007: 12). Many advisory boards were dismantled as a result of the advice of the de Jong Committee (Commissie-De Jong 1993), and thereafter in March of 1995 an amendment of the VVD<sup>4</sup> terminated the obligation to gather information for relevant issues for the Social Economic Council<sup>5</sup> (SER) as well (Bos et al. 2007: 13). Criticism of the ‘syrupiness’, or viscosity, of Dutch consultation structures reached a culmination, and with the help of these implemented policies the cabinet seemed to want to demolish the polder model, which was partially deemed as maintainer of the socioeconomic problems (Andeweg 2000: 704; Bos et al. 2007: 13). In 1996 this thinking changed, and the syrupy consultation system was redefined into a praiseworthy polder model (Andeweg 2000: 705-706; Bos et al. 2007: 13).

The best known institutions of the consultation economy date back shortly before the First World War: the Association of Labor (*Stichting van de Arbeid*), in which employers with employees jointly and without interference of the state deliberated, was established in 1945; and the Social Economic Council (*Sociaal Economische Raad*: SER), successor of the Central Economic Council from the 1930s and the council in which the state is represented, dates back to 1950 (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 85; Bos et al. 2007: 19). In 1919 the High Council of Labor was founded, an advisory board for the government in which employers and employees participated (Bos et al. 2007: 19). Incidentally, central consultation existed between employers and employees. Generally speaking, in these preliminary councils the same persons

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<sup>3</sup> The Purple Cabinet signifies that the coalition in government consists of both left- and right-wing parties (red and blue).

<sup>4</sup> *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*: People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy.

<sup>5</sup> *Sociaal Economische Raad*: the tripartite consultation board of the government and its social partners.

were involved (Bos et al. 2007: 19). This illustrated one of the most important values of the institutional polder model; continuity of the principal staff (Bos et al. 2007: 19). This is because employers and employees are natural opponents and it is, therefore, difficult to create trust in order to reach agreements (Bos et al. 2007: 19). It is, thus, of utmost importance that the principal staff needs to trust each other and, with this prerequisite in mind, the Accord of Wassenaar was created in 1982.

Enthusiasm for the Dutch polder model was prominently seen abroad, since various countries throughout the Western world were struggling with economic problems (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 24). Instead of abhorrence for the 'Dutch Disease', as the economic problems in the Netherlands were called, there was praise for 'the Dutch Model' (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 21-22; Andeweg 2000: 706; Bos et al. 2007: 13). The ultimate peak of (international) appreciation for the model was reached in 1997 during the Global Competitive Report, during which the origin of the concept was discussed (Bos et al. 2007: 13). Especially, political leaders from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States were fond of the model (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 22; Bos et al. 2007: 14), since they had been looking for the *Third Way*: capitalism with a social face, softened by social democratic values (Bos et al. 2007: 15). The Netherlands seemed to have found the ultimate combination: controlled public finances, economic growth, rapid growth of employment, and a well-established social system (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 24-25). Successes of the model were thought to lie within the forms of harmonic consultation (Bos et al. 2007: 15).

Just like the 'the Third Way', the polder model was not portrayed as abolishing capitalism, or substantially changing it, but as a derivative that could be as successful as the classical American model yet without the social disadvantages (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 21; Bos et al. 2007: 16). The social democrats were interested in such a portrayal of circumstances, because it emphasized a deliberative relation between the government and the relevant target unions. The most authoritative defender of the polder model was Wim Kok, the social democratic Prime Minister (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 31; Bos et al. 2007: 17). In 1994 he started without much enthusiasm with the purple collaboration government, which later became a success (Bos et al. 2007: 17). As president of the FNV<sup>6</sup> he successfully joined the catholic and social democratic trade unions. He had also stood at the cradle of the Accord of Wassenaar in 1982 (Hemerijck & Visser 1997: 117-118), which was (symbolically) seen as the start of the recovery of the good relationships between the social partners in the Netherlands (Bos et al. 2007: 17). Wim Kok had the most experience in a consultation economy: some argue he was the incarnation of the polder model, and his Labor party defended the model (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 117; Bos et al. 2007: 17). Ironically, it was also during his two purple coalition cabinets that many formal corporatist boards were being dismantled.

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<sup>6</sup> Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging: Dutch Federation of Trade Unions.

In short, the term ‘polder model’ was a godsend: ‘the Dutch Model’ has been the representation for the way we ‘do’ governance in the Netherlands, ranging from socio-economic policy-making, the tackling of the drugs problem, environmental issues, to sex education (Bos et al. 2007: 13). Admiration for the polder model kept growing, and the word itself was used on a day to day basis between 1997 and 2000 (Bos et al. 2007: 13). After 2000, the use of the word ‘poldermodel’ declined steadily. This motion is thought to go in parallel with the conjuncture of the popularity of the model and, more or less, the economic height that reached a peak in the second half of the 1990s (Bos et al. 2007: 13). While politics in the Netherlands showed restraint with regards to the model, the international popularity was significant. This was due to the combination of employment growth, good economic numbers, and harmonic social consultation (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 24-26; Bos et al. 2007: 18). However, a recent study has shown that there was no specific ‘Dutch miracle’ during the 1990s (e.g. Woldendorp & Keman 2007). This is because the corporatist consultation between social partners and the state existed long before the crisis and, therefore, cannot be seen as the only solution for the problems in the 1990s (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 30; Andeweg 2000:697; Woldendorp 2005: 7-8; Bos et al. 2007: 18). However, the economic success explains why the international attention for the system existed. Thus, the polder model has been celebrated as much as it has been unhailed. This disparity is discussed further in the next section.

#### **4.2 The Problem with the Polder Model**

After the World Wars the Dutch welfare state was eminently corporatist. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, discussions of the role of advisory boards and interest groups reached a culmination (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). The CDA who was the most important proponent of the corporatist system, had lost its position to lobby for a positive outcome of the external advisory boards (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). The idea of a corporatist system in a Purple Cabinet did not seem to appeal to the ruling parties, since all had various negative experiences with the model (Helderman et al. 2014: 31; Bos et al. 2007). The main reason for wanting to abandon the corporatist system was that the decision-making process was thought to create a gap between citizens and politicians (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). They argued that the advisory boards and interest groups needed to give back their power to the parliamentary democracy and politicians and, thus, repressing the influence of these councils (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). In 1991 a Special Committee on Issues regarding the advisory boards was thus founded that advised on cleaning out any surplus advisory councils (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). In 1993, this particular committee, which was also known as the De Jong Committee, published the report *Customized Advice [Raad op Maat]* in which they argued that with exception of the Council of State all advisory boards and interest groups should be dissolved within three years (Helderman et al. 2014: 31; Commissie-De Jong 1993). Instead of

the obligation to obtain advice on policy issues, it became standard to merely ask for advice (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). This was due to the experience of the ‘syrupiness’ of the neo-corporatist system during the decision-making process (MOCW 2006: 12). By means of this advisory system, the aim was to reach consensus on particular policy issues (MOCW 2006: 12). The total number of advisory boards decreased from 120 to 23 fixed and roughly 20 temporary advisory associations (MOCW 2006: 11): each ministry was supposed to have only one advisory organization, whereby advice and consultation were to be divided (Helderman et al. 2014: 31). Yet, the *Customized Advice* report appeared to be insufficient, and a new reform act, *Advisory System Reform Act*, was published. This reform also became known as the ‘Desert Act’ [*Woestijnwet*], since it claimed that all advisory organizations should be dissolved with exception of the Council of State, the SER and the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) (Helderman et al. 2014: 31; MOCW 2006: 11). In short, due to the alterations made in the advisory system on political and administrative system the formal interdependence between social and public interest groups and governments was concluded through the appointment of permanent and ad hoc advisory boards (WOCW 2006: 12; Commissie-Fortuyn 1990; Commissie De Jong 1993; Groenewegen en Neskuee 1995).

In conclusion, the problem with the polder model seemed to lie with the altering attitudes towards the polder model in the 1990s and 2000s. During this time the use of the polder model was diminished due to the viscosity of Dutch consultation. By implementing particular policies most advisory boards and interest groups were dismantled (Andeweg 2000: 704; Bos et al. 2007: 13). However, in 1996 the praiseworthy polder model was reinstated as a successful governance style in the Netherlands (Andeweg 2000: 705-706; Bos et al. 2007: 13).

#### **4.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Polder Model**

Several advantages can be ascribed to the successes of the polder model. The main success of the polder model is predominantly due to the reduction of long-term unemployment, the establishment of new jobs, and the increase of the gross domestic product (GDP). As brought forward by Delsen (2002: 49) ‘the most important explanatory factor behind this success is the moderate development in wage costs as a result of the reduction of the burden of taxation and social security contributions, cutbacks, and the effect of the workings of the labor market’. The Netherlands Bank played a significant role in the economic success (Delsen 2002: 32), while the Wassenaar Agreement barely contributed to the results (Delsen 2002: 27-31). In addition, external effects provided a positive outcome, which were comprised of the expenditure impulse as a result of the German reunion, the right product package in the given phase of the business cycle, and the positive outcome of the low interest rate on expenditure (Delsen 2002: 34-41). The last factor is the change in culture, since the increased number of working women caused and made the

moderation of wages possible (Delsen 2002: 47-48).

However, there are also some disadvantages to the polder model. First, while the model seems to ensure an employment growth, this increase tends to only involve flexible jobs and small part-time jobs in the service sector (Delsen 2002: 51-56). According to Delsen (2002: 81) the employment growth cannot be seen as a miracle, 'it would be a miracle if employment growth had occurred in highly productive jobs in the services sector'. Second, in comparison to other countries the use of the possible labor force is too low, which increases pressure on the work floor and decreases the quality of the environment (Delsen 2002: 62; 81). In addition, unemployment is divided unequally, since most of the job loss is found at the bottom of the labor market (Delsen 2002: 57).

Another problem with the polder model is the use of the word itself. Visser & Hemerijck (1997) consciously do not include the word 'polder model' in their discussion of corporatism in the Netherlands. They do this because the model itself cannot be used as a policy example for other countries despite its successful and positive role in solving problems around the modernization of the welfare state in the Netherlands (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 235). The process of modernizing the welfare state was full of unforeseen setbacks such as a severe economic crisis, a change in balance of power between capital and labor, an increase in inactivity, and changes in the political landscape (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 235). In most cases the existence of the polder model aided in overcoming these problems (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 235). However, there is no uniform, institutional pattern of a 'polder model' that can be applied in all policy fields. First, there is no constant use of consensus, since the idea of consensus only seems to be applied when there is international danger or a national crisis (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 236). Second, when impasses could not be fixed by the neo-corporatist model policy actors were required to significantly deviate from the model and change the process (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 236). Third, the idea behind the word 'polder model' is linked too much with the concept of virtue, since many changes were just convenient for the time being and seen as moderating reactions to a sudden crisis, rather than making changes that were for the long term and completely solving the issues (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 236). For policy learning to work it needs to not only change the process in a short period of time but also for the long-term (Visser & Hemerijck 1997: 236).

Taking these pros and cons into consideration, Delsen (2002: 191) argues that the negative aspects of the polder model do not weight up to its advantages. The polder model touches on distinctive aspects of Dutch culture and institutions, such as individualism, consensus and consultation (Delsen 2002: 185). It is, therefore, important to keep the polder model alive for economic and social motivations (Delsen 2002: 191). This has to do with the size, participation, content and quality of company training courses provided by Dutch consultative institutions, but also the protection the polder model provides for

the market: the system needs protection from segmentation, short-sightedness and a decrease of motivation to invest in education and training due to the increasing demand of flexibility (see Delsen 2002: 83-134; and 190-191). It is important to note that, while it is expected, the relation between the polder (in early-modern times) and the polder model does not seem to be extremely strong (Bos 2007: 26-27). The structure of a polder by itself did not lead to an egalitarian society: the hierarchy remained visible nonetheless (Bos et al. 2007: 26-27). Furthermore, people within a polder needed to cooperate, while in surrounding polders conflicts aroused that were not yet solved by the harmonic polder model (Bos et al. 2007: 26-27).

#### **4.4 Polder Model and Dutch Identity**

As discussed above, the polder model has much in common with the neo-corporatist institutions and practices in the socio-economic sector, but the term polder model has also taken on a life of its own. As explained above, this is also the reason for Visser and Hemerijck (1997) to not use the term polder model in their research. The polder model is, thus, not solely incorporated in the political and socio-economic sphere, but it is also presented as part of Dutch national heritage (Bos et al. 2007: 22). This aspect comes close to Evert Rongen's thesis when he claimed he was a 'polderlander' (Bos et al. 2007: 22). Evert Rongen was influenced by the story and relevance of the battle against the sea for Dutch identity. However, both analogies are quite metaphorical, and are based on a schematic conception of Dutch identity (Andeweg 2000: 698; Bos et al. 2007: 22). That is where the problems of a relation between water, polders, and the consultation economy starts (Bos et al. 2007: 22). It is easy to relate Dutch identity with water - the polders also figure in the story - but no emphasis is put on consensus. Often the egalitarian structure of society as a result of the dominance of water that would have made absolutism impossible is emphasized (Bos et al. 2007: 22).

It is important to note that the polder model and structures of an earlier democracy are not the same. The 'consensus democracy' has aspects in common with the model, but they are also contradictory (Bos et al. 2007: 23). The 'discussion culture' in the Netherlands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century dealt with congregating, but also with transparency (Bos et al. 2007: 23). Yet, the question is whether the polder model is really that transparent. The consensus based polder-consultation from the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which partners considered themselves equals, presumed a certain closeness (Bos et al. 2007: 23). Compromises were done without the public, and long before that, it was already decided who got to participate (i.e. exclusion). This manner of consultation has more in common with a cabinet, than a parliament, in which closeness and limitation of actors is part of the process (Bos et al. 2007: 23).

As discussed above, the popularity of the model was greatly influenced by the international

interests during the 1990s (Bos et al. 2007: 25). The term became so popular because the concept was completely unique, and seemed to cure the same 'diseases' other countries were suffering from as well. The attention for the model in the 1990s can be explained through the special and successful structure of the economic system in the Netherlands, the search for the Third Way in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the economic problems in Germany and other countries (Bos et al. 2007: 25). What is interesting is that such a large amount of trust was put into the Dutch system (Bos et al. 2007: 25). The attention for the polder model seemed to grow and subside parallel to the demand for effective social and economic solutions (Bos et al. 2007: 26). However, as many times as the polder model has been renounced, actors are not willing or capable to completely reject the use of the model. This is seen throughout all layers of Dutch society.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Do we take the polder model for granted? Or has its success really been overemphasized as Woldendorp (2005) argues? At the moment the polder model is used more and more. At certain times the polder model was in disgrace, which then again contributes to the mythologizing of model. The problem seems to lie with the ambiguity of what the polder model means, and what kind of function it has in Dutch society and government. This becomes apparent when taking the various definitions of the polder model into consideration and the discussion on the origin of the term. However, whether the polder model has gained too much appraisal or not, is perhaps of less importance than its meaning for the governmentality of the Netherlands. By studying the polder model in terms of 'governmentality', we may better understand why it has been praised and criticized over the past few decades. The assumption is that various factors, as discussed in the next chapter, contribute to and are able to explain these fluctuations of attitude. For pragmatic reasons we have chosen to look at a shorter period of seven years: from 2009 until 2016.

## Chapter 5 Mythologizing the Polder Model

In this chapter the results of the content analysis are discussed. In total 118 articles between the years of 2009 and 2016 were analyzed using a coding system. The coding scheme was established by taking in consideration the problematizations of the governmentality of actors on the polder model. The problematizations were clearly seen during this period due to the conflict of the pension accords. For several years political parties and unions were unable to reach an agreement during the deliberations on the new pension and wage arrangements. This chapter starts with a timeline of relevant events of this conflict period, which also resembles the de-mythologizing of the polder model. This discussion is then followed by an explanation of various variables in relation to the mythologizing of the polder model between 2009 and 2016. Finally, the governmentality that is shown during this period is discussed.

### 5.1 Timeline of Data

This section discusses the results from the empirical data (see Appendix B). Multiple variables were selected to find a correlation between different variables that could explain the ‘crisis’, and our understanding of the polder model and the use of its myths between 2009 and 2016. The combinations that were selected were the position and actor response per year; the position of actors and the policy arena; the position of actors and the sector; actor and actor response; actor and position; actor and narrative; narrative and position; actor and consensus, harmony and consultation; position and consensus, harmony and consultation; actor and immobility; and immobility and its dependent disengagement (see Appendix B). The discussion of the events and variables was conducted by creating a timeline for the events described in the newspaper articles.

#### *2009*

Due to the economic crisis in 2009, the polder model is stated to be holding back developments in various sectors (Trouw, 12 March 2009). One article even proclaimed the launching of a substitute of the polder model, the ‘Rijndeltamodel’ (Het Financieele Dagblad, 27 May 2009). Most articles in 2009 claimed that the polder model had created an ‘icy and fruitless permafrost’ between the various unions due to the cumbersome discussions about increasing the state pension age from 65 to 67 years of age. The VNO-NCW had lost faith in finding a solution altogether, and later in 2009 stated that the polder model had reached its end (Dagblad van het Noorden, 24 November 2009). This was caused by the incompetence of the SER as an advisory board, and the steadfastness of the FNV. The VNO-NCW argued that this went against the Dutch polder model and economy (De Telegraaf 19 September 2009). The failing negotiations were even considered to be a ‘wrinkle’ in the polder model (Nederlands Dagblad, 21 November 2009).

Nevertheless, despite the failing negotiations employers and entrepreneurs defended the polder model in voicing that the model had not collapsed as a result of these negotiations. They argued that ‘poldering was part of our soul’ (Trouw, 2 October 2009). This argument was also backed by several articles that made an analogy to the arduous deliberations of the Hedwigepolder – without upkeep a polder (model) cannot exist (Trouw, 5 November 2009).

Thus, at the start of 2009 we see that the attitude towards the polder model was fairly negative (See Appendix B, fig. 7). It was argued that the Dutch culture of deliberation had created a deadlock, since the polder model only functioned well when the economy was growing. Mostly actors within the economic sector responded to the circumstances around the failing negotiations (see Appendix B, fig. 5-6). When examining the overall response to the polder model, it was regarded to be quite successful. Most actors responded to the polder model as a system that worked but was under pressure. The various unions tended to feel strongly about this statement while also claiming that in general the polder model should not be abandoned.

### *2010*

At the beginning of 2010 the unions were not able to make any progress on the negotiations of the increasing of the state pension age. Nevertheless, newspaper articles commented on the significance of the polder model, thereby arguing for a renewal of the model (Nederlands Dagblad, 23 April 2010). The year of 2010, thus, showed similar responses to the year before - with exception of a decrease in responses that the polder model had returned (See Appendix B, fig. 2). A possible explanation for this is the imbalance within the FNV, and the impasse between the unions and political parties on the pension and wage accords. The VNO-NCW<sup>7</sup> was publicly pronouncing that they were worried about the new tactics used by the FNV (Het Financieele Dagblad, 17 May 2010). However, voices from the Second Chamber were heard stating that the VNO-NCW should embrace these new tactics (Het Financieele Dagblad, 20 May 2010). The CNV then again expressed its doubts by commenting that a minority government would endanger the polder model and, therefore, they could not ensure their position within politics (Trouw, 11 August 2010).

### *2011*

To start off, in 2011 there seemed to be an increasing negative outlook on the polder model. During this year there was still unrest around the new pension accord and the various unions. The FNV was threatening to pull back from the negotiations with the other unions. The CNV responded that the

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<sup>7</sup> The VNO-NCW: the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers

turbulence within the FNV was the main cause of their disappointment (NRC Handelsblad, 5 April 2011). More articles commented on the power struggle within the FNV. Some articles argued that the aging and radicalizing followers of the FNV pressured the polder model, because they were not able to come to a decision (NRC Handelsblad, 6 May 2011). The polder model was even called undemocratic due to the unfair deliberations of the pension accords – meaning it either had to change or be replaced (Tubantia, 21 May 2011). Some saw the deliberations as being the **final test** for the polder model (De Volkskrant, 11 June 2011). Even political parties started to meddle in the discussions – there appeared to be a hard divide between various parties (Algemeen Dagblad, 14 September 2011). Despite the fact that the unions were clashing the FNV and CNV argued against these parties, because they believed that the political parties were taking the polder model apart piece by piece (Algemeen Dagblad, 11 October 2011). The argument was that too much power was placed in the hands of the politicians.

Furthermore, the year 2011 stands out in that there were more doubting or negative opinions of the polder model than in previous years (See Appendix B, fig 1-2). While the responses did not differ much, it is clear from the table that actors were questioning the functioning of the polder. In the newspapers more and more claims were being made for the polder model to be renewed, so that it would fit better within the given time period (BN/DeStem, 28 October 2011). In addition, many actors argued that the polder model was under a lot of pressure. The discussion regarding the polder model had increased significantly, particularly by experts, the FNV, and authors of opinion articles (See Appendix B, fig. 6). Striking is that due to the imbalance and discord within the various unions, there was an increase in response by opponents of the polder model exclaiming the overall failure of it. This can, of course, be seen as a political strategy to find supporters for the demise and abandonment of the model by using the media.

## *2012*

The year 2012 stands out from the other years due to the higher number of articles that discussed the polder model. In the course of 2012 there was a shift from a more negative point of view on the model to a significant growth of positivism amongst the actors. At the end of 2011 the unions were able to prevent any bigger rupture between the various polder model players even though the power struggle was not completely overcome (NRC Handelsblad, 5 December 2011). The polder model was said to have stalled (NRC Handelsblad, 28 December 2011). At the start of 2012 the unstable situation within the FNV had not improved. The CNV was voicing its legitimate concern about the further existence of the polder model, yet it had become clear from the articles that the CNV did not want to give up on the model – it just had to be altered (NRC Handelsblad, 21 January 2012). Not only the FNV was having issues, since the chairman

of the SER had announced his leave – arguing that the polder model was not what it used to be: it just needed to be reinvented to succeed again (Eindhovens Dagblad, 17 March 2012). The polder model was put under even more pressure due to the intervention of the government to speed up the policymaking process (De Telegraaf, 26 May 2012). At some point during this year influential companies voiced their concerns about the situation between the unions publicly, and stated that it would be sensible to breathe new life into the polder model (Het Financieele Dagblad, 31 July 2012). In addition, the new chairman of SER said that he was a supporter of the famous model – he called on the FNV to put their business in order quickly (Eindhovens Dagblad, 8 September 2012). Towards the end of the year, various political actors were publicly voicing the fact that the polder model had returned and that it was working again. This had to do with the fact that the crisis within the FNV had been resolved, and the increasing role of the entrepreneurs, the CNV, and the new chair of the SER (NRC Handelsblad, 27 October 2012). The model seemed to be restored after the revival by the new coalition, and despite the reluctance of the FNV to make decisions. The general opinion towards the model was, thus, very positive, in spite of the opinion that the model needed to be renewed further.

### *2013*

During the year 2013 there was a decrease in the number of articles that discussed the polder model. When looking at the articles, the situation within the FNV seemed to have calmed down significantly. In addition, the positive influence of entrepreneurs was beneficial to continuing the existence of the polder model. Lastly, the unions and political parties were no longer at an impasse. Overall, the attitude towards the polder model appeared to be less negative, most likely due to the stabilized situation within the unions and the ongoing support for the use of the polder model from the Cabinet (De Volkskrant, 6 March 2013).

However, just after the summer break the polder model seemed to be challenged again. This time thanks to the inability to come to agreements concerning other socio-economic policies (NRC Handelsblad, 13 September 2013). Yet, certain political parties and unions mentioned that there was no reason to abandon the model (Financieele Dagblad, 4 November 2013).

### *2014*

In 2014 there was a disparity in the responses of actors towards the polder model (See Appendix B, fig. 6-7). On the one hand, the trend that had started in 2013 continued in which they stated that it was necessary for the polder model to continue expanding. Mainly the proponents of the model, the unions, and the authors of the opinion articles shared this statement. On the other hand, certain actors continued to argue that the polder model was starting to stall (Het Financieele Dagblad, 4 January 2014). A particular argument for this was that the model was not working because the players did not understand the modern

economy anymore. They had forgotten the overarching societal importance (Het Financieele Dagblad, 18 January 2014). Mid-2014 the polder model seemed to have made a comeback again, even expanding the system (Het Financieele Dagblad, 9 July 2014).

### 2015-2016

In 2015 and 2016, so far, expressions towards the polder seemed to have quieted down. Various actors continued with demanding the further revision of the polder model (e.g. De Telegraaf, 5 March 2015), but circumstances seemed to have changed significantly. A possible explanation for this is that there was no imbalance or discord within the unions, and between them and other relevant actors.

As is shown in the data, especially the unions experienced various deadlocks over the years. This was mainly in the socioeconomic sector due to the deliberation on the new pension and wage accords. Interesting is that the newspaper articles mostly mention the inability to come to an agreement, rather than succeeding in agreeing (see Appendix B, fig. 12). A possible reason for the numerous deadlocks within the union was the unstable situation within the FNV and the inability to come to an agreement on the pension accords. Another possible reason for the higher documentation of non-overcome deadlocks was the mediatization of problems. Problems, which have been overcome, are no longer a threat for the future and therefore less likely to be referred to in the media. However, this explanation goes beyond the scope of this study, but it is something to keep in mind. Furthermore, the experts and the authors of the opinion articles appear to mention multiple deadlocks between various actors: most of which have not been overcome, and several for which a solution was found. The question remains whether the dependent variable *disengagement* can provide an explanation why these deadlocks were or were not overcome, and which strategies were used.

The effect of neo-corporatism was measured through the variables *immobility* and the dependent variable of *disengagement*. Disengagement is dependent on immobility, since without an impasse between various actors there is no reason for the government to interfere to solve the issue. We see this notion in the data (see Appendix B, fig. 13), since the code for non-interference by the government scores significantly higher than the codes that describe a certain strategy or threat. When actors are at an impasse, this shows the weaknesses – or maybe even the failure – of the polder model. Sometimes the key principles of the polder model need to be abandoned in order to solve a particular problem. We see that disengagement by the government does not occur often, and that the deadlocks between relevant actors seem to be resolved through further deliberations. Furthermore, there seems to be no particular pattern as to why or when the government interferes. Interesting to note is that occasionally the government will threaten to come between the actors in order to solve the problem.

These events also illustrate the four stages of corporatism (Visser & Hemerijck 1997) quite clearly in that it shows the immobility between the parties and the disengagement by the government. Once the disengagement is overcome, belief in the polder model increases and is seemingly going back to responsive corporatism – realizing that they need each other to succeed. This process has influence on the governmentality of the polder model. This is because actors were willing to continue using the model while the system was failing them. Through this type of governmentality, and regime of practice, the polder model can endure. The question remains whether the myths surrounding the polder model are conserved during this troublesome period.

## **5.2 The Polder Model and Myth**

In this section the mythologizing of the polder model is discussed through the various myths that are presented in the articles. In order to make this discussion more understandable, particular variables are discussed together. The variables that are paired are policy arena and sector; actor response and position; and consensus, harmony and consultation. The variable narrative is discussed separately, and the variable actor is intertwined throughout the discussion of the other combinations.

### **5.2.1 Narrative**

What we see is that mainly the proponents, unions, experts, the opinion articles, and artists refer to the polder model as being a myth in Dutch society (see Appendix B, fig. 8). Three types of myth can be discovered. The first type seems to cover the story around the reclamation of land and the battle against water; the argument is that since the Middle Ages Dutch people have been working together in an egalitarian manner to live on dry land. Because of this, governance in the Netherlands is based on consultation, harmony and consensus between various parties throughout society. Examples of the use of this type of myth are: the photographer, Taco Anema, documented the polder model with a series of photographs of governance, showing the Dutch administrative culture throughout all layers of society (Het Parool, 14 June 2014). Furthermore, a lobby group claimed that a particular Dutch landscape needed to become part of the World Heritage List, because it referred to the basis of the polder model (AD/Groene Hart, 4 March 2015).

The second type of myth is that the polder model is part of everyday life in the Netherlands, that it has been part of Dutch history and identity for centuries, and that it can be found in every aspect of Dutch life. For example, the national soccer team Ajax used the polder model to talk to fanatics about certain policy issues. The articles mention that the negotiations are going troublesome (Het Parool, 16 October 2015). Yet, another article comments that in athletics the polder model does not work (De Telegraaf, 20

August 2011). Furthermore, several articles show the instatement of the polder model as an expedient for their pending issues. The polder model was instated after some commotion of the placement of an UMTS-mast (Haarlems Dagblad, 21 June 2014). Furthermore, the agricultural lobby group ZLTO was able to put the polder model to maximum use during their negotiations on increasing the amount of cows and, thus creating 'megastables' (Brabants Dagblad, 9 February 2013). Also, the polder model is used against increasing threats of web criminals by the National Cyber Security Center (De Stentor, 13 January 2012).

The third myth that was found was the argument that the polder model was seen as a symbol and metaphor of mobilizing power and making changes. While this myth was used the least amount of times, it is the most realistic out of all the myths, and can be closely linked to the concepts of harmony, consensus and consultation.

Of these three myths, the second myth type was used most often to explain the significance or meaning of the polder model. It appears that the second type is used most often because it shows the magnitude of influence the polder model has – this, of course, does not mean that everyone agrees with the polder model, but as is discussed in a later section this does not seem to be of great significance. Interesting is that even the slightest news on the polder model got published in the media. A PhD-student from Leiden University argued that the polder model was not as Dutch as expected, and that the polder model was initially invented by a Frenchman (Algemeen Dagblad, 18 November 2009). However, in later articles this did not seem to be acknowledged. Reasons for not acknowledging this statement are potentially the nationalistic and patriotic feelings surrounding the polder model. It is important to note that several newspaper articles elaborate extensively on the history of the polder model (De Volkskrant, 12 June 2010), even more so than academic papers. Most of these articles remark that the polder model is in line with the story of the battle against the water – commenting on the fact that consensus and deliberation has been part of Dutch society for centuries. The polder model, thus, started during the Middle Ages (Nederlands Dagblad, 8 March 2013) and can, therefore, explain its immense popularity over the years. An argument against this is that even though the polder model has such a rich history, it is not necessarily a recipe for success (Het Financieele Dagblad, 9 March 2013).

It is clear that different political myths are used by several actors to explain the polder model. This is particularly done by proponents, experts and unions: the users of the narrative are overall supporters of the polder model. In the articles the narratives are used to explain the situation, history, and/or the importance of the polder model. The theory of political myth also explains the changing of a myth to fit within a given context, and followed by the re-appropriation of the myth. Using the articles that were analyzed, it was not possible to distinguish any alteration of the myth. It is possible that the context around

the narrative has remained the same over the years and, therefore, is not changed. The expectation was that a narrative is only used to describe the positive effect of the polder model, but the data shows that also negative responses use a narrative as explanation for the polder model.

Hence, the data illustrates that there is no effect of the narratives on the functioning of the polder model. As described in the previous section, various actors were unable to come to an agreement on the certain socio-economic policy. Despite the arduous deliberations, actors were not willing to abandon the use of the polder model. This shows that the governmentality of the polder model is deeply rooted in Dutch governance. It appears that the idea of letting go of the polder model is not an option. In terms of governmentality, the polder model refers to a distinct style of governance for the Dutch welfare state that is sufficient and necessary for good policy- and decision-making. This style of governance can also be identified as a regime of practice, because it shows the manner in which Dutch actors think about and maintain a particular type of governing during a certain time - it demonstrates the routinized and ritualized way of governing.

Interestingly, the political myth and collective memory did not change over the years. The three myths that were discussed were used alternately, and the content of each narrative did not change. An explanation for this is its strong cultural and political foundation. Potentially, the model was regarded successful in such an extent that there was no need to abandon it even after hardship – its political story and collective memory is strongly rooted in society. This shows that the role of political myth and collective memory is significant. This is because the polder model is linked to a particular significance for a group or individual, which can be linked to the use of a political myth through the story of the battle against the water. The collective memory of (successes in) the past support the reproduction of the polder model throughout all layers in society. This notion is also supported by the data on policy arena and sector.

### **5.2.2 Policy Arena and Sector**

In general, most responses to polder model were made within the economic-socio arena, followed by the political arena (see Appendix B, fig. 3). Furthermore, most arenas seemed to respond positively to the polder model. While actors seemed to be positive about the functionality of the polder model, the actor responses show that most actors responded by pleading for a renewal of the model, or that the model is still relevant but that it is under pressure (see Appendix B, fig. 5). This plea for renewal might be interpreted as a changing governmentality and, thus, an altering regime of practice. This pattern is clearly seen in the 2011 and 2012. This appeared to be linked to the impasse between the actors regarding the pension and wage accords. Only the economic policy arena showed mixed responses of, on the one hand, support for the polder model and, on the other hand, doubt and negativity. When comparing the position

of actors and the sector in which they operate, there does not seem to be a big difference in data compared to the policy arena (see Appendix B, fig. 4). Again, the data showed that generally all sectors were positive when it came to the polder model. A few exceptions can be made because of some negative responses in the sector of (professional) soccer, the environmental sector, and the historical description of the polder model. The socioeconomic policy arena tends to use the narrative the most. This policy arena mostly talks about the battle against the water and the polder model as being part of Dutch identity (See Appendix B, fig. 14). The cultural policy arena also refers to these two myths, of which the narrative on Dutch identity is referred to the most. Interestingly, the political policy arena also addresses the myth of the polder model being part of everyday Dutch life, yet it is the only arena that alludes to the polder model as a symbol and metaphor of mobilizing powers and change. The environmental policy arena refers to the importance of the polders for Dutch society and the emergence of the polder model. This could be described as the visual aspect of the polder model – i.e. actually being able to see and experience what a polder entails and how it operates.

It is possible to draw the following conclusion from these results: the use of the polder model is found throughout many different sectors and policy arenas in Dutch government and society. This shows that the governmentality that working together and deliberating about issues is thought about and found in all sectors of Dutch life. This does not mean that the polder model was successful in each case, but it does say something about the idea that the polder model was a valid strategy for finding a solution for a particular problem.

### **5.2.3 Consensus, Harmony and Consultation**

The variables consensus, harmony and consultation are discussed together because they are three core neo-corporatist elements of the polder model. When looking at consensus, the evidence shows that most actors report the inability to reach a consensus (see Appendix B, fig. 10a; 10b; 10c). Very few articles actually make mention of actors reaching consensus. There is also a significant number of articles that mention the need for consensus, or the importance of it, without explicitly stating consensus had been reached or not. What we observe in particular is that the unions have trouble reaching consensus, of which the FNV appears to be most in disagreement with other actors. Harmony is closely related to the ability to reach consensus. An explanation for this is that without consensus there cannot be any form of harmony, and vice versa. Furthermore, interesting is that the lower the positivity towards the polder model, the less consensus and harmony was reached between the various actors (see Appendix B, fig. 11a; 11b; 11c). There seemed to be as much consultation between actors that were both negative as positive towards the polder model. Interesting is that both positive and negative actors voice the fact that

consultation is important. Overall, consultation seemed to occur consistently, or articles made mention of it occurring in the future.

Again the evidence shows is that the use of consensus, harmony and consultation is not solely ascribed to political actors. For example, the coach of a recreational soccer team uses the polder model to fight discontent within the team (Noord Hollands Dagblad, 28 August 2010). Another example is the darts association in a small village in the Netherlands that has been successful in implementing and using the polder model in their decision-making process (BN/DeStem, 23 December 2014). And large companies used the polder model to come to agreements on environmental policies (Leidsch Dagblad, 20 November 2014). It would make sense that these variables make mention of the third myth type, which describes the polder model as being a symbol and metaphor of mobilizing power and change. Explanations for this are that this type of myth is most realistic and can be directly linked to insights from the neo-corporatist theory. However, the data shows that the narrative of the battle against the water and the polder model as being part of Dutch identity is used the most. Mention of the third type of myth was made in correspondence with the idea that consensus is important to realize, and reference to this particular myth was only made twice (See Appendix B, fig. 15).

The polder model is part of Dutch collective memory in such a significant manner that the polder model is not just used for politics or socio-economic policy, but also for recreational activities, arts, fighting cybercrime and sports. What these associations and sectors have in common is that they all strive for consensus and harmony through consultation. The narrative of battling and working together is seen in every part of Dutch life and society and, thus, creating a communal affiliation with the polder model through an egalitarian deliberation system. In essence, this is the regime of practice on which the governmentality of governance in the Netherlands is based.

#### **5.2.4 Actor Response and Position**

In general, there seems to be an increase of the amount of responses on the polder model starting from 2010, resulting in a high peak in 2012, and a decline in the following years (see Appendix B, fig. 1). Various details in the data are important to note. Overall, there are more positive than negative responses to the polder model for both the actor response and their position (see Appendix B, fig. 2), even though the model did not function as effectively as it should have. When comparing the actors and their position, it is apparent that in the past seven years, most actors respond positive towards the polder model (see Appendix B, fig. 6-7). It is important to note that, besides proponents of the model and the unions, various entrepreneurs that were reported talking about the polder model are overall very positive over its functioning and influence. From 2009 until 2016 this view does not seem to change.

However, there seems to be no specific correlation between the position of actors and the use of a narrative (see Appendix B, fig. 9). It must be noted that the degree of positive outlook is generally higher and, therefore, this cannot necessarily mean that a positive response leads to the use of a myth. As seen in the data, a negative response would discuss the polder model in connection with the battle against the water and the reclamation of land just as likely as a positive response. As noted in the previous section, the use and interpretation of the polder model is found in all sectors of Dutch society and identity.

### **5.3 Forming a Governmentality**

When connecting this data to the conceptual scheme, several observations can be made. Three types of political myths were discovered as means to explain the significance of the polder model within various aspects of Dutch society. Not only was the polder model used in the political and socio-economic sphere, it was consequently used in the environmental, cultural, and recreational sectors. This influences the governmentality of the polder model in that the governing in such a way has been done for a very long time and throughout all layers of Dutch society. This idea is closely related to the concept of collective memory, because this idea that the polder model has always been part of Dutch identity is a reconstruction of ideas and thoughts from the past. This can also be considered a collective action, since so many different layers within society use the polder model. What is most interesting is that the actors did not intend on abandoning the polder model despite the inability to sometimes work with it. This shows that even though the polder model is not always successful, it is so deeply rooted within society that actors are not willing to renounce it. Actors claimed that once the regime of practice was changed, the polder model would be successful again. This claim for renewal was again related to the large number of deadlocks within the researched period. Actors were, thus, not able to reach consensus and harmony during their consultations, and as a consequence the government occasionally needed to interfere. However, after a period of immobile corporatism and corporatist disengagement, corporatism in the Netherlands seemed to move towards responsive corporatism where negotiations between various actors is of utmost importance. The fact that governance in the Netherlands is capable of moving to these various stages of corporatism shows that actors are willing to work with the polder model. Despite the hardships, the overall position and responses towards the polder model is positive. This positivity then again influences the mythologizing aspects of the polder model.

Overall, the way actors think about governing in the Netherlands between 2009 and 2016 shows that they are not willing to abandon the specific governance style of the polder model. However, once the deliberation between various parties seemed to fail, actors claimed that the regime of practice needed to change. It is important to note that despite the alterations that were made the essence of the polder

model stayed intact. The problems with the deadlocks seemed to solely occur in the political and socio-economic sector. The principle nature of consensus, harmony and consultation is continually seen throughout all layers in Dutch society with success.

#### **5.4 Conclusion of Results**

In general the data indicates that actors are more positive towards the polder model than negative. There was a change in attitude when the polder model was not working as effectively as perceived. Once balance is restored, the view of the polder model seems to become more satisfying. This is also seen in the actor responses, where they argue that there is either overall success for the polder model or that they are anticipating a renewal of the model and, thus, continuing with its core principles. Most of the responses are made in the socio-economic and political policy arena and sector. While most other sectors and policy arenas respond positively towards the polder model, only the socio-economic policy arena shows some dissatisfaction with the workings of the system. As documented in the previous section, a possible explanation for this is the troublesome consultation between various actors on the pension and wage accords, which fall under the jurisdiction of the said policy arena and sector. Interestingly, while the actor appears to be positive towards the polder model, a significant number of actors in the socio-economic and political sector cry for renewal of the present system. I argue that this has to do with the deadlock surrounding the negotiations on the pension and wages with the unions. Opponents of the polder model use this imbalance to respond with dismissal towards the system during this time. After a turbulent period and when the balance is restored, the opponents of the polder model cease negative rhetoric. It is, thus, only in the 2011 and 2012 that the opponents are vocal in expressing their discontent with the model. While it is perhaps slightly evident, proponents, union and entrepreneurs continue to support the polder model even in tumultuous times. An assumption would be that these actors can use a narrative or a myth to explain a given context, event, or situation. We find that each actor uses a particular narrative to explain a situation. As seen in the data, opponents tend to use the narrative that explains the polder model as a system where people worked together to battle against the water and reclaim the land, while other actors use any of the other myths to explain the situation. Overall, there seems to be no evidence that the myth is solely used as a legitimization for the polder model. Next, there is a relation between the variables consensus and harmony. When looking at these two variables, these scored near identical: a possible explanation is that without consensus there can be no harmony, and vice versa. Interesting to note is that the ability to reach consensus and harmony decreases when the positivity towards the polder model is drops. While consultation belongs to the same group as consensus and harmony, it appears to behave more on its own in that while there may not be consensus and harmony, there is most certainly always

consultation between the actors. Without consultation it is not possible to determine whether actors are able to reach harmony and consensus or not. Consultation also distinguishes whether actors are at an impasse, and are disengaged in any way by the government. The data shows that most actors were not at an impasse, and if they were that it was not yet overcome. There seems to be no particular pattern when it comes to the interference of the government to get control over the impasse. The government tends to rather not interfere than intervene in the process.

The overall governmentality of the polder model appears to be very positive. While actors claimed that the regime of practice needed to be changed to fit better within their times, they were not willing to abandon the model altogether.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion and Discussion

In this study our understanding and the significance of the governmentality of the polder model was researched. This research started with the discussion of the theories of governmentality, political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism were described (Dean 2010; Bottici & Challand 2004; Rothstein 2005). Governmentality regards the manner in which people think they are and how they want to be governed (Dean 2010). This can explain why actors choose to continue using the polder model all throughout Dutch society, even when it failed to be successful in the socio-economic policy arena. Political myth and collective memory were used as possible explanations for a particular governmentality that is portrayed with the polder model. These theories helped us to reconstruct the myth behind the polder model, and the idea of a distinct Dutch governance style. Neo-corporatism, on the other hand, is more concerned with linking the various institutional interests of civil society with that of governmental institutions (Schmitter 1974: 86). Neo-corporatism was, therefore, used as a theoretical basis for the polder model, since it is the only theory that comes closest to explaining the actual workings of the polder model. By using these theories it was possible to make a theoretical conceptual scheme that showed the relation between the various theories, from which problem definitions are developed that supported specific elements of each theory. These problem definitions were used as codes for finding important components in the empirical data. Next, a political sociological introduction was provided by looking at the polder model in the Netherlands. Below a detailed conclusion of this study is provided, followed by a discussion of this research.

### 6.1 Answering the Research Question

This study aimed at discovering which meanings are attached to using the polder model as the portrayal of governmentality in Dutch governance and society. In order to answer the main research question it is necessary to look at the various sub-questions that were looked at in this study.

*Which theories help us to unravel the governmentality of the polder model in Dutch governance?*

Theories that further helped explain the governmentality of the polder model in Dutch governance were political myth, collective memory and neo-corporatism. Political myth and collective memory are capable of explaining the mythologizing characteristics of the governmentality of the polder model, while neo-corporatism describes the de-mythologizing aspects in looking at the *Werdegang* of the model. These theories, thus, aid in understanding the governmentality of the polder model in Dutch governance, and their regimes of practice. The regimes of practices were researched through the problematization of government.

*How can our understanding and significance of the governmentality of the polder model be researched?*

Multiple problematizations, which were closely linked to the discussed theories, were created in order to research the governmentality of the polder model between 2009 and 2016. The problematizations, which were selected, were narrative; policy arena and sector; position and actor response; harmony, consensus and consultation; and immobility and disengagement. Each of these problematizations were linked to the discussed theories and aid in explaining the governmentality of the polder model. In addition to these variables, the unit of sampling (i.e. newspapers) and units of analysis (i.e. actors) were recorded for each article. The research was done by looking at various newspaper articles between 2009 and 2016 that explicitly mention the polder model. This period was chosen because it was considered to be politically unstable.

*How was the polder model in the Netherlands constituted as a political sociological institution in the 1990s and 2000s?*

In the Netherlands the polder model has had its ups and downs. Due to the economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, the Netherlands seemed to have caught the 'Dutch Disease'. This economic problems that came with the disease were overcome by the neo-corporatist system that became known as the polder model. While the polder model was clearly seen to have success, the system was rather looked down upon than celebrated. This was due to the 'syrupy' nature of the deliberation and consensus economy. During the 1990s the neo-corporatist nature of Dutch governance diminished due to the abolishment of interest groups and advisory boards. However, the system seemed to have imprinted on all layers throughout Dutch society, and the disadvantages of the model did not seem to weigh up to the advantages. The model was not solely incorporated in Dutch politics and economics, but it also seemed to be presented as part of Dutch identity.

*How is the polder model portrayed between 2009 and 2016 in everyday media, and how does this contribute to the mythologizing or de-mythologizing of the polder model?*

The period from 2009 until 2016 was marked as a time of crisis due to the large amount of immobility between relevant actors. While the overall response towards the polder model was positive, actors did cry out for the polder model to be renewed. Despite the arduous deliberations and the politically unstable circumstances the polder model was not abandoned. The use of the political myths and the collective memory surrounding the polder model are capable of explaining the lack of desire to abandon the polder model and, thus, explaining the governmentality. What we see is that despite the negative or positive

attitudes towards the polder model, the model itself has gained enough ground over the years – this being either multiple decades or centuries – that actors rather adjust the model to the contemporary time than abandon it. Interesting to see is that when the economy is in a crisis, actors tend to go back to the polder model as an evident strategy of fixing the issue. Interestingly, newspaper articles refer regularly to the historical background of the polder model, more so than academic papers. The authors of these popular news articles tell these stories as being a factual historic background – this characterizes the mythologizing of the polder model and grants inherent rights of existence to the myth. Three types of myths were discovered: the first described the polder model as the result of the battle against the water and the reclamation of land; the second myth claimed that the polder model was part of Dutch identity and part of everyday life in the Netherlands; and the third myth referred to the polder model as the symbol and metaphor of mobilizing powers and change. Many of these articles, thus, use the myth of the battle against the water to lend credibility to the polder model. However, it is to be expected that any myth is used as a legitimization of the polder model to serve the purpose of relevant actors (becoming a political myth), this appeared not to be the case. Despite the negative image of the polder model in some articles, the battle against the water myth was also used in these instances to explain the process.

In addition, while the political landscape changed and the polder model was expanded by government in 2013, there did not seem to be a need to change any part of the various myths around the polder model. This again explains the continual use of the polder model, and the lack of desire to abandon the model – i.e. governmentality on the polder model. It is evident, also with the attention in the international arena for the polder model, that the polder model and the stories surrounding it have become general knowledge and, thus, creating a collective memory. This idea is even reinforced by the fact that several articles argue that the polder model is part of Dutch society and identity. This can again influence the way the polder model was rather adapted than abandoned in dire times. While corporatism was not explicitly mentioned as the theoretical variant of the polder model in the newspaper articles, its characteristics were clearly present nevertheless. This was seen by the amount of immobility between various actors during their negotiations, sometimes even leading to a disengagement. Interesting is that despite the number and length of impasses between certain actors the polder model was not abandoned.

As this research has shown the polder model has both mythologizing as well as de-mythologizing characteristics. This also reflects on the governmentality of the polder model. Political myth and collective memory explain the mythologizing aspects, while neo-corporatism describes the de-mythologizing aspects. The de-mythologization of the polder model is seen solely considering the working of the polder model and the neo-corporatist idea that governments, relevant interest groups and advisory boards

should co-operate to solve socioeconomic problems. This is illustrated by the inability of relevant actors to come to an agreement, resulting in an impasse. Using the four stages of neo-corporatism this is also called immobile corporatism (Visser & Hemerijck 1997). When these actors are unable to overcome the deadlock, the government can decide to intervene – this is also called corporatist disengagement. These two phases are clearly seen in data from 2009 to 2016. The mythologizing aspects of the polder model return once the impasse is overcome and deliberations between actors are resumed, which is also called responsive corporatism. During this process the governmentality of the polder model is clearly seen, because if actors wish to alter particular regimes of practice they are able to do so. The data shows, however, that within the discussed period actors are not interested in completely changing the specific governance style in the Netherlands, and that the political myth and collective memory creating this governmentality are deeply rooted in all layers of Dutch society.

Now that the sub-questions have been answered it is possible to look at the main question of this study. The main question that was looked at asked: *which meanings are attached to the polder model as a portrayal of the 'governmentality' of the Netherlands?*

This study has shown that the polder model is perceived and received in a positive manner. Not only can the polder model be found in the socio-economic and political sector, but also in arts, sports, environmental issue and even the fight against cybercrime. As discussed above, three types of political myth were used to support the polder model. The use of these myths are fundamental for understanding the governmentality in the Netherlands. The essence of these myths state that the polder model is embedded in Dutch society and life, because it has been the way of governing for centuries. In addition, these myths emphasize the success of the polder model in the past. The polder model symbolizes making changes together, and mobilizing powers. The polder model is generally seen as successful regime of practice, and the failures or weaknesses of the system do not weight heavy on the idea that the model needs to be abandoned. It is a system that Dutch society can fall back on. In short, the polder model is of high significance for the Dutch governance style and, therefore, has an important meaning that is and has been embedded in the roots of Dutch society for a long time.

## **6.2 Reflection on the Theories**

Researching the governmentality of the polder model in the Netherlands is perhaps unconventional and therefore asked for an unconventional approach. I aimed at providing a detailed description of this governmentality as possible. While the various theories that constitute governmentality seemed to cover all the necessary aspects of the theory, some elements were not treated due to the scope of this study. First, the idea of mythologizing and de-mythologizing is incredibly interesting, but perhaps deserved more

space in this research. During the writing process these two aspects have been added, removed, and reintroduced numerous times due to its abstract and sometimes vague characteristics. Second, two theories that could help ‘strengthen’ the (de-)mythologizing of the polder model are the concepts of nationalism and patriotism. These two concepts would aid the explanation of the use of particular political myth and collective memory, especially when these stories and memories as thoughts as being specifically Dutch.

One of the limitations of this study concerns the coding of articles. A recommendation for further research would be to have multiple coders using the coding scheme, averaging the scores of the coders and, therefore, creating a higher validity of the study. Another recommendation is to include articles which make mention of the polder model without explicitly stating the name. Due to the scope of this research the decision was made to merely look at articles that use the word ‘poldermodel’ in the text. However, if the polder model is genuinely part of everyday life, this would suggest that some actors may mentioning certain characteristics and, thus, referring to the polder model in other words. Another recommendation is to include other media sources, such as radio and television shows, documentaries, weekly and monthly magazines, and the internet. To make this study more complete, it may be necessary to include interviews with key actors that played a significant role during certain time periods.

### **6.3 Discussion**

One aspect that cannot be neglected is the relationship between the polder model and crises. While this research was not aimed at examining the influence of the polder model on the dealing of actors with crises, it does come to the attention that some correlation can be found. As discussed in this thesis, the deliberations on the pension and wage accords brought some unrest amongst the actors and within certain organizations. While these actors were in strife with one another, the discussion about the use of the polder model peaked. Once the balance between the actors returned, the conversation about the polder model became non-existent. It is important to note that more research needs to be done on this topic by analyzing articles from earlier time periods.

Since I am fascinated with archaeology and the ancient history, I would be extremely interesting to look at the polder model as a *lieu de mémoire*, a place of memory. What is so interesting and fascinating about this is that polder model can literally refer to the place ‘polder’, but it can also signify the figurative place of remembering an object or idea of significance. As is seen in this study, the importance and significance of the polder model is immense – it can be considered important to such an extent that it deserves its own place in a museum.

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## Appendix A: Code Book

### Unit of sampling: which newspaper

- 1 NRC Handelsblad
- 2 de Volkskrant
- 3 het Financieele Dagblad
- 4 NRC Next
- 5 De Telegraaf
- 6 Algemeen Dagblad
- 7 Het Parool
- 8 De Gooi- & Eemlander
- 9 Nederlands Dagblad
- 10 BN/DeStem
- 11 Leidsch Dagblad
- 12 De Gelderlander
- 0 Unable to Determine

### Unit of Analysis: actor

<b>1</b>	Proponents of polder model	Wim Kok / Labour Party / PvdA / Ruud Lubbers / Lilianne Ploumen
<b>2</b>	Opponents of polder model	Pim Fortuyn / right-wing conservatives / LPF / PVV
<b>3</b>	Unions	In general / no distinction made
	3a CNV	
	3b SER	
	3c VNO-NCW	
	3d FNV	
	3e ACOM	
	3f NCSC	
	3g Environmental unions	ZLTO /
	3h PZO-ZZP	Denis Maessen
<b>4</b>	International actors	Tony Blair / Bill Clinton / Tunisia
<b>5</b>	Sports & Recreational actors	Ajax / Darts (DIP Impact) / AGSV-trainer
<b>6</b>	Professionals / Academics / advisors / expert	
<b>7</b>	Author of article	Opinion articles without specific actor
<b>8</b>	Entrepreneurs	Philips / DSM / André v.d. Elsen / etc.
<b>9</b>	Artist	Photographer Taco Anema / Museum
<b>0</b>	Unable to determine	

**Actor Response:** the response of the actors on a specific topic.

- 0 No response
- 1 Overall success for polder model
- 2 Overall failure for polder model
- 3 Polder model used to work but it doesn't anymore: renewal of polder model
- 4 Polder model works but it is under pressure
- 5 Success, further expansion of polder model
- 6 Polder model is part of identity
- 7 Polder model is back, success.

**Policy Arena:** A political arena can be identified as “a sphere of interest, interest or competition”. Policy arena is the venue in which the policy is discussed.

- 0 Unable to determine
- 1 Economy / economical / social
- 2 Political / Politics
- 3 Recreation / sports
- 4 Democracy / democratization / human rights
- 5 Cultural
- 6 International Affairs / Foreign Trade & Development
- 7 Environmental
- 8 Health
- 9 Water boards
- 10 Security & Safety
- 11 Infrastructure

**Sector:** “a part or branch of an economy, or of particular industry or activity”.

- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 0 Unable to determine       | 10 Telecom           |
| 1 Economy / finance /social | 11 Photography       |
| 2 Political / politics      | 12 History           |
| 3 (Professional) soccer     | 13 Housing accords   |
| 4 International affairs     | 14 Farming           |
| 5 Lobbying                  | 15 Public            |
| 6 Heritage management       | 16 Crime             |
| 7 Foreign Trade             | 17 Animal protection |
| 8 Darts                     | 18 Tabaco Industry   |
| 9 Environmental             | 19 Car Industry      |

**Position:** “a proposition or thesis laid down or stated; something posited; a statement, an assertion; a tenet, a belief, opinion”.

- |   |          |   |
|---|----------|---|
| 0 | neutral  | position is neutral towards the polder model  |
| 1 | negative | position is negative towards the polder model |

- |   |                     |  |
|---|---------------------|--|
| 2 | fairly negative     | position is fairly negative towards the polder model |
| 3 | doubting            | position is doubting the polder model                |
| 4 | fairly positive     | position is fairly positive towards the polder model |
| 5 | positive            | position is positive towards the polder model        |
| 9 | Unable to determine |  |

**Consensus:** “agreement in opinion; the collective unanimous opinion of a number of persons”

- 1 consensus was reached between relevant actors
- 2 consensus was not reached yet / no consensus
- 3 consensus between actors but failed later
- 4 actor makes mention of consensus (indirectly)
- 5 consensus is important (for polder model)
- 9 unable to determine

**Harmony:** “combination or adaptation of parts, elements, or related things, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole; agreement, accord, congruity”

- 1 there was harmony amongst the actors
- 2 there was discord between the various actors / no harmony
- 3 actor makes mention of harmony (indirectly)
- 4 harmony is important
- 9 unable to determine

**Consultation:** “the action of consulting or taking counsel together; deliberation, conference”

- 1 there was consultation/deliberation between various actors
- 2 there was not consultation/deliberation between various actors
- 3 actor makes mention of consultation (indirectly)
- 4 there needs to be consultation/deliberation (to solve problem)
- 5 there was consultation, but it didn't work
- 6 consultation is important
- 9 unable to determine

**Narrative:** a representation of a history, biography, process, etc., in which a sequence of events has been constructed into a story in accordance with a particular ideology.

- 1 there was no mention of a narrative or myth
- 2 reference to myth; battle against water, reclamation of land
- 3 reference to myth; part of Dutch identity / part of every part of Dutch life/history
- 4 reference to myth; symbol and metaphor of mobilizing powers
- 9 unable to determine

**Immobility:** When looking at the policymaking process, immobile corporatism regards the impasse or deadlock of relevant actors during their consultations.

- 9 unable to determine
- 1 actors are not at an impasse
- 2 there is a deadlock, but it has been overcome
- 3 there is a deadlock, but it has not been overcome
- 4 actors were at an impasse in the past

**Disengagement:** Disengagement occurs when discussing parties are at an impasse, and the government intervenes by replacing actors by other organization or themselves

- 9 unable to determine
- 1 no interference by government to solve issue
- 2 interference by government without mentioning specific strategy
- 3 Government threatens to intervene
- 4 interference by government by implementing wage restraint & shorter working hours
- 5 Interference by government by promoting increasing flexibility of employment
- 6 Interference by government by implementing/reinstating polder model
- 7 Interference by government by increasing salary
- 8 interference by government by making SNS a state bank
- 10 Interference by government by asking for more flexibility in creating CAOs
- 11 Interference by government by excluding taking away power from union
- 12 Interference by government by increasing state pension age



Figure 4: Sector & Position

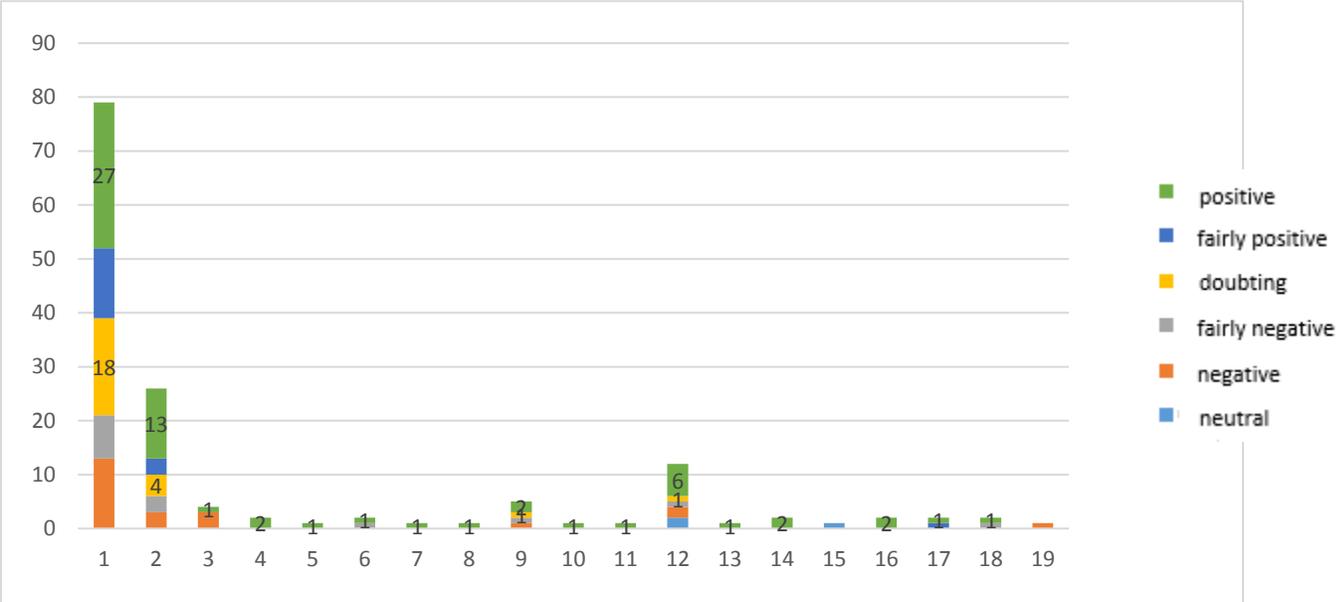


Figure 5: Policy Arena & Actor Response per year

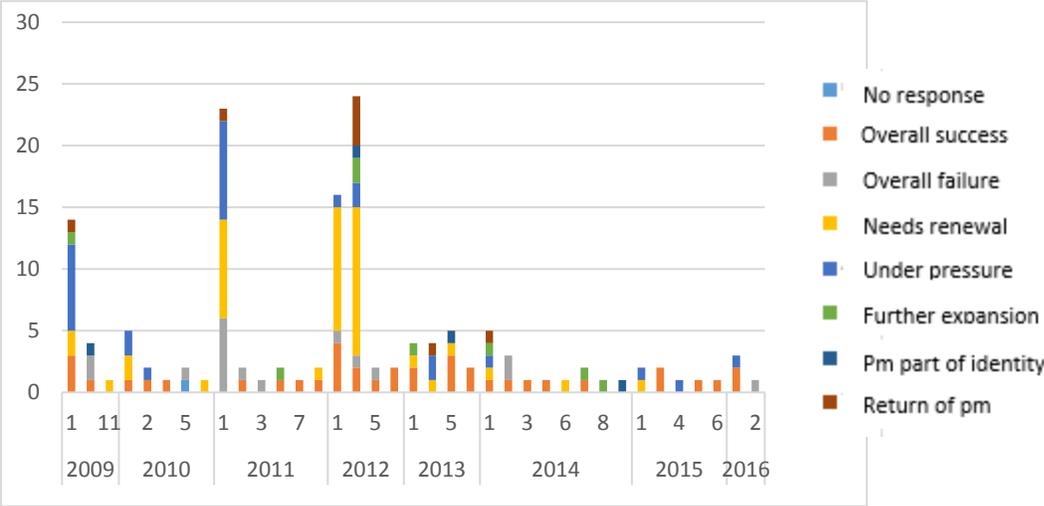


Figure 6: Actor Response & Actors per year

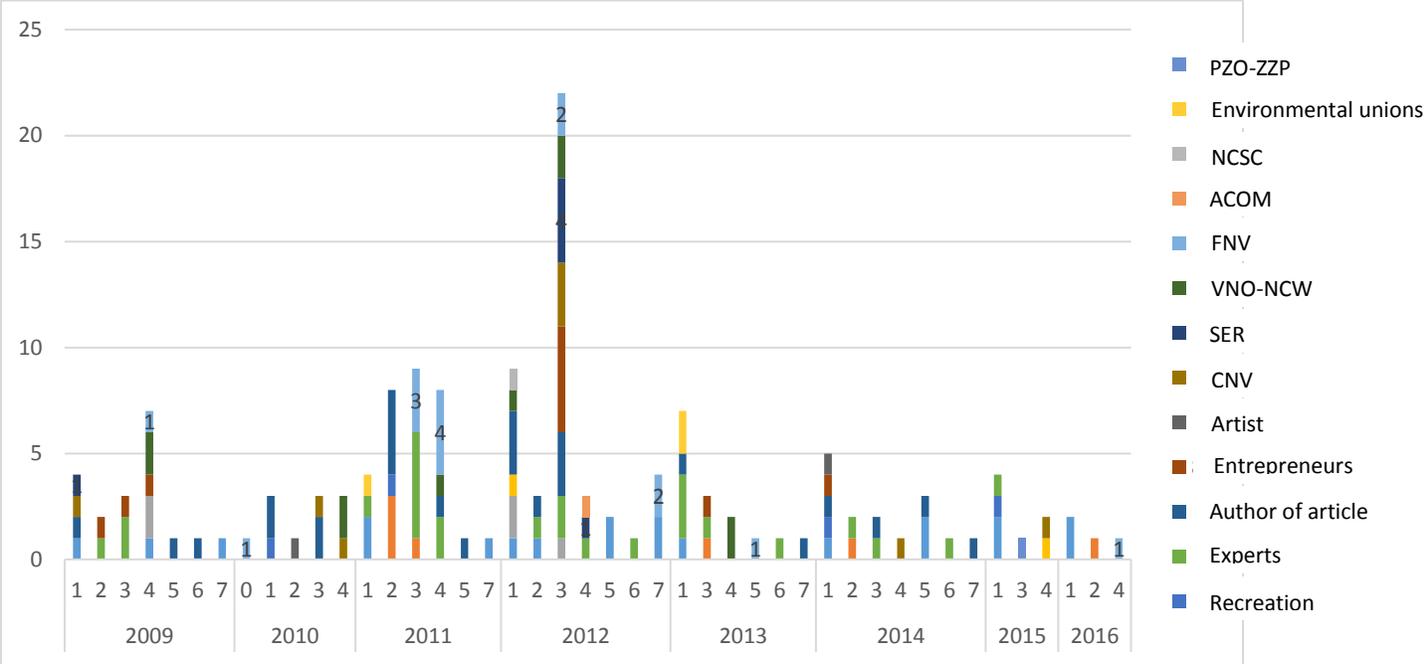


Figure 7: Actors & Position per year

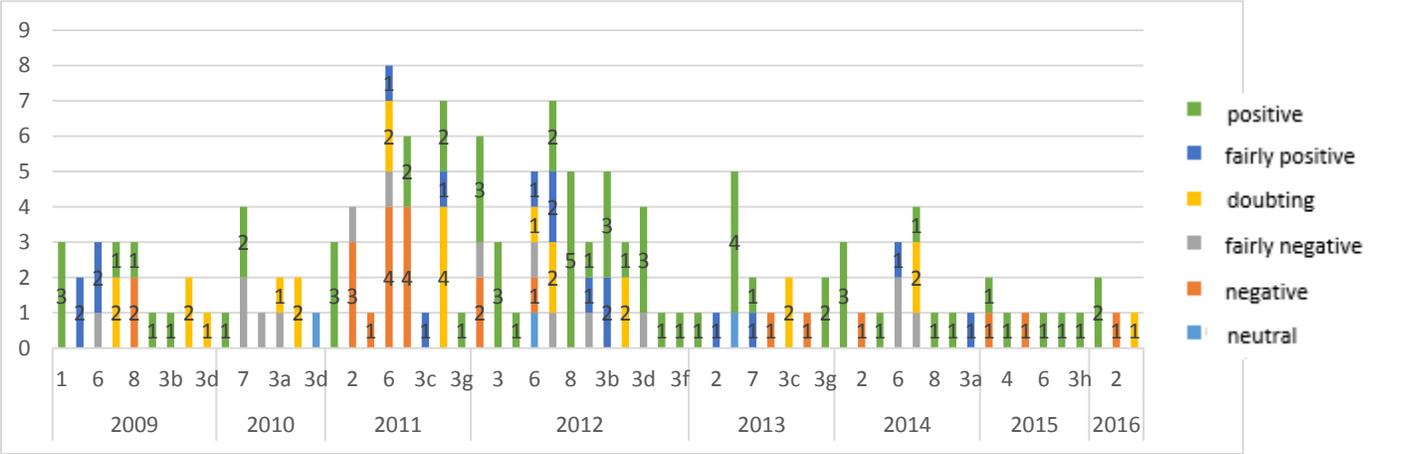


Figure 8: Actor & Narrative

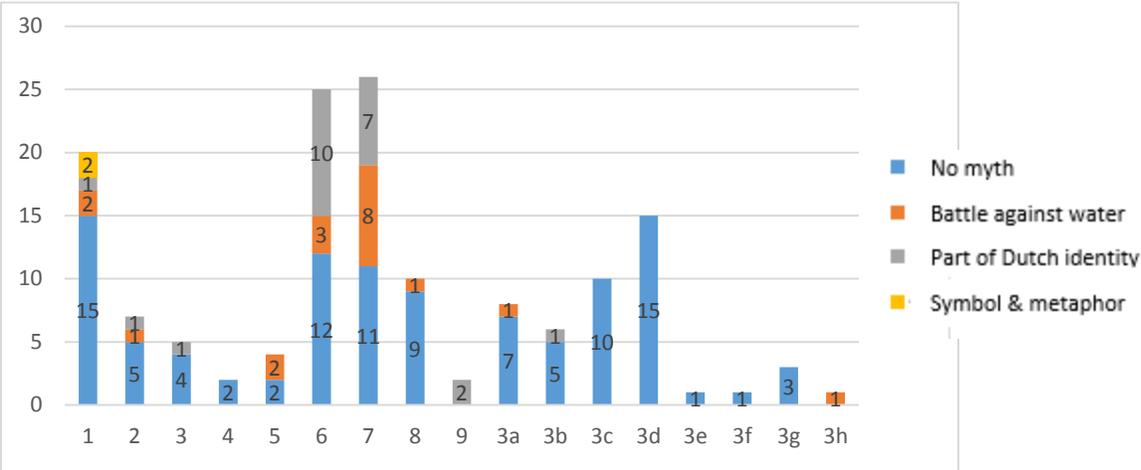


Figure 9: Position & Narrative

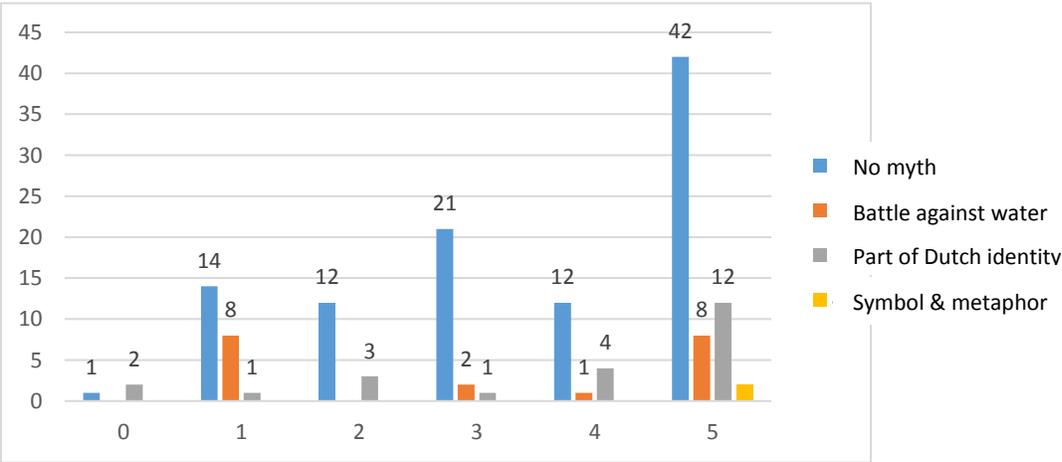


Figure 10a: Actor & Consensus

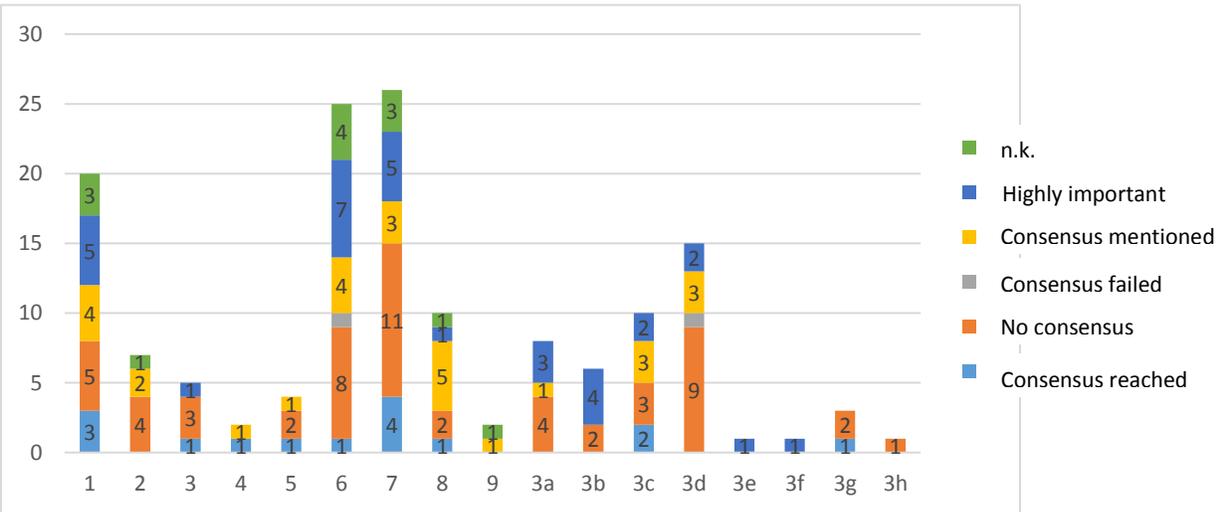


Figure 10b: Actor & Harmony

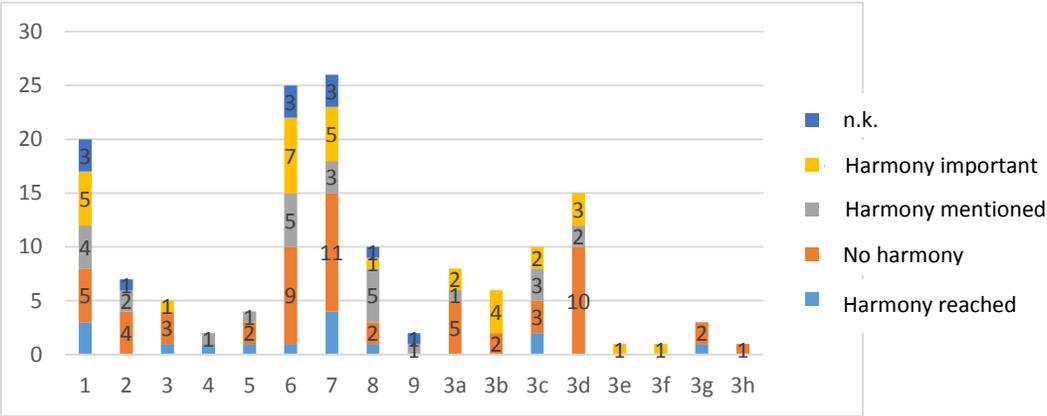


Figure 10c: Actor & Consultation

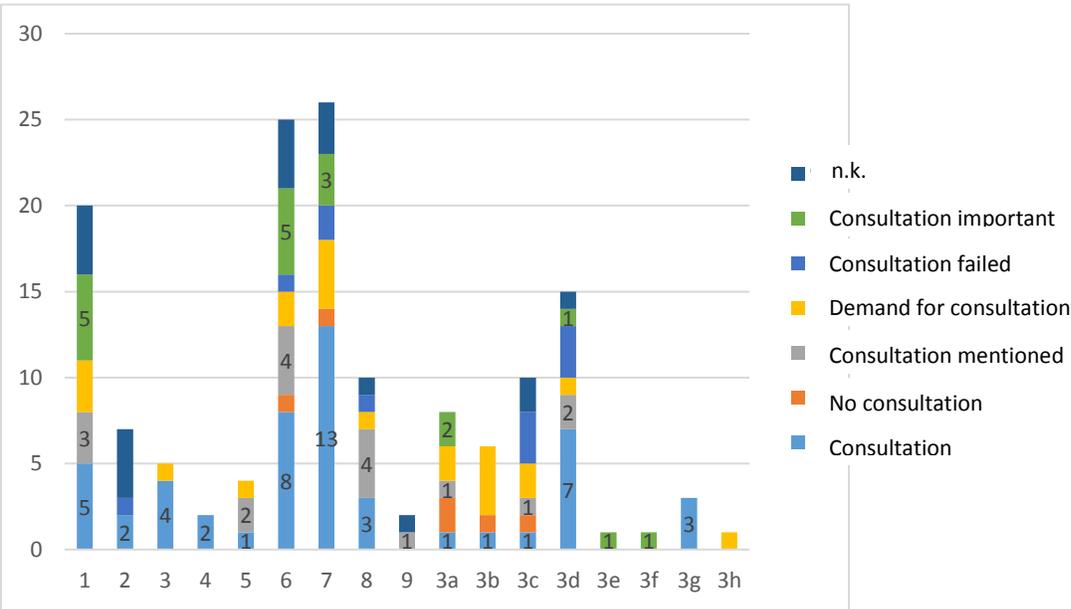


Figure 11a: Position & Consensus

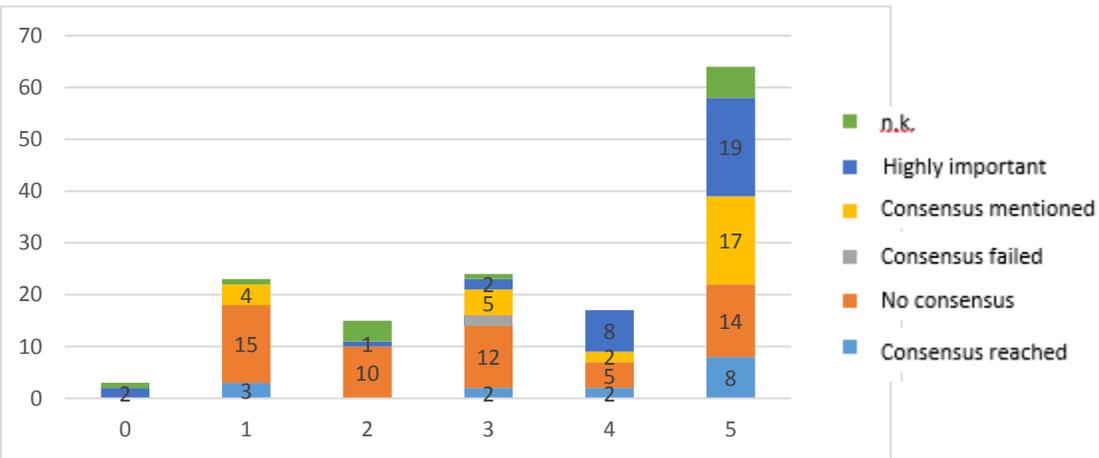


Figure 11b: Position & Harmony

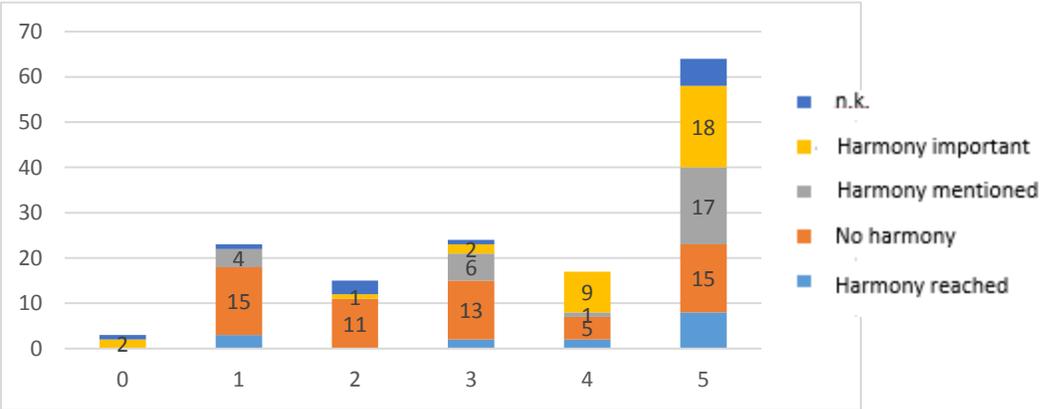


Figure 11c: Position & Consultation

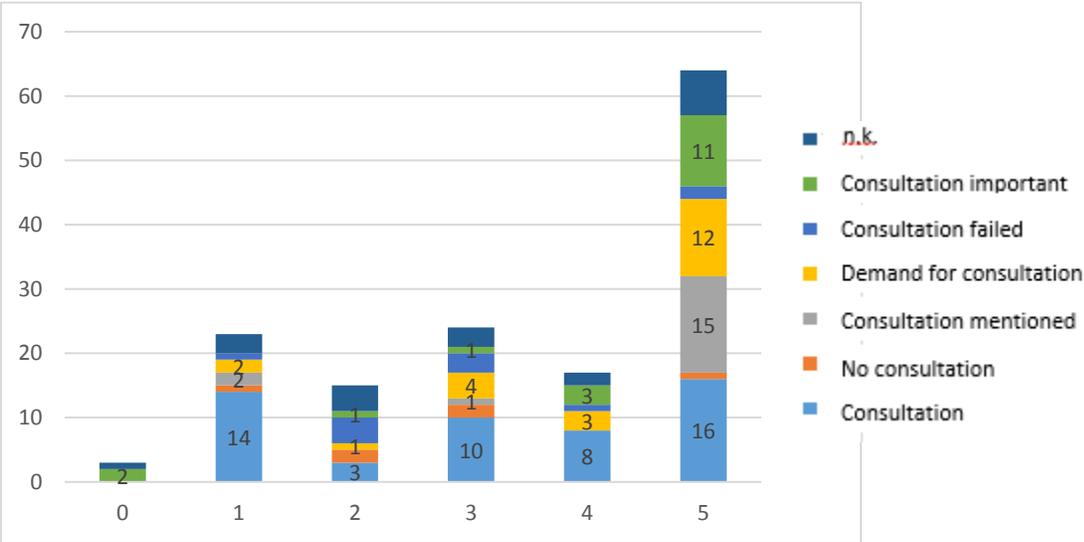


Figure 12: Actor and Immobility

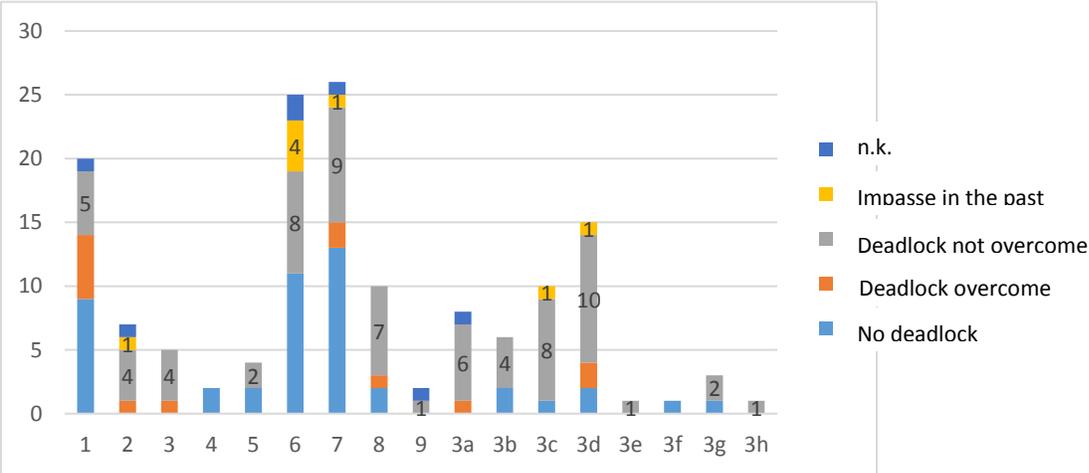


Figure 13: Immobility and Disengagement

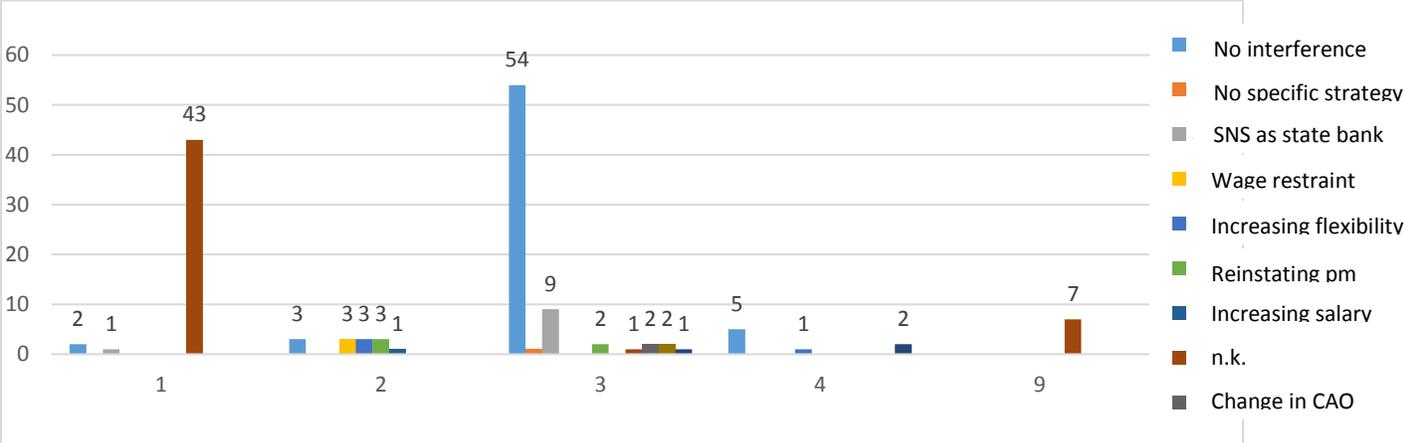


Figure 14: Policy Arena and Narrative

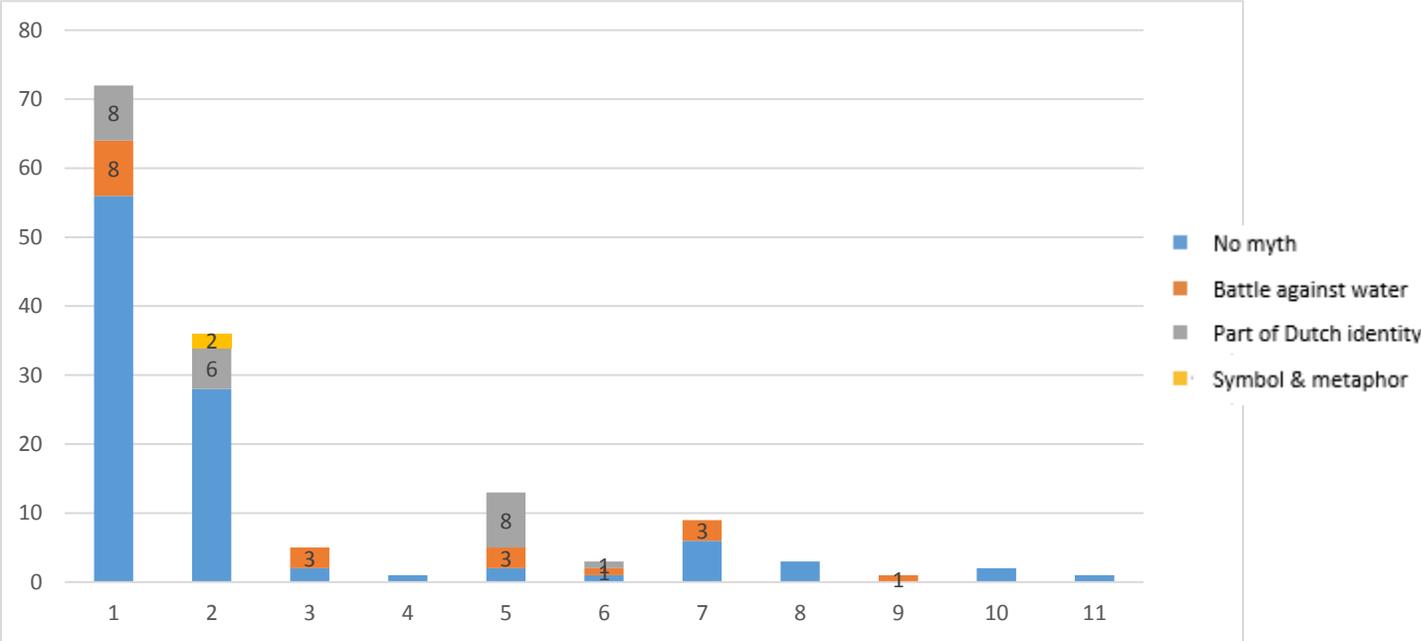


Figure 15: Consensus and Narrative

