

# Cultural Memory Theory & Policy Analysis

A case study of the influence of cultural memory dynamics in the Dutch water policy community

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## Voorwoord

De irrationele en subjectieve beleving van mensen die vaak zo bepalend is voor hoe de werkelijkheid is vormgegeven in combinatie met (filosofische) theorieën over hoe je die fenomenen kan duiden: dat is mijn interesse die mij heeft bewogen om me bezig te houden met de invloed van ‘cultureel geheugen’ op beleidsprocessen en uitkomsten. Ik vind het fascinerende van het concept cultureel geheugen dat het niet gaat over wat objectief waar is of zou moeten zijn, maar over hoe mensen het verleden *in het heden* herinneren. Dat is per definitie een subjectieve aangelegenheid, maar wel één van grote betekenis. Aangezien het verleden nu eenmaal in het heden wordt geconstrueerd beïnvloedt het de werkelijkheid en daarmee is het mijns inziens zinnig om het te bestuderen. Ik hoop dat mijn interesse voor dit onderwerp zich heeft kunnen vertalen in een scriptie die met plezier gelezen wordt.

Een thesis schrijven is hard zwoegen en ik heb het geweten. Met de tijd die ik erover gedaan heb, heb ik het landelijk gemiddelde vast wat omhoog gehaald. Dit betekent niet dat alle uren die erin zitten even effectief waren. Er is een periode geweest waarin ik me afvroeg of ik ooit nog zou afstuderen (en waarschijnlijk velen met mij). Ik ben daarom extra trots dat het me toch gelukt is en dat ik uiteindelijk een mooie scriptie heb kunnen schrijven. Om dit te kunnen bereiken heb ik veel hulp gehad, zowel inhoudelijk, procesmatig en persoonlijk. Ik wil deze bladzijde dan vooral gebruiken om de mensen te bedanken zonder wie ik deze scriptie niet had kunnen schrijven.

Allereerst wil ik alle respondenten bedanken die bereid waren om met mij in gesprek te gaan over het OESO rapport. Ik heb genoten van de levendige gesprekken, de openheid en jullie passie voor het maken van goed waterbeleid. Ik heb door jullie heel veel geleerd over hoe het Nederlandse watermanagement in elkaar steekt en hoe relevant dit onderwerp eigenlijk is voor de (inter)nationale agenda. Ik ben ook heel benieuwd wat jullie van mijn scriptie vinden, aangezien mijn onderzoek misschien een andere invalshoek heeft dan jullie hadden verwacht.

In het bijzonder dank ik Peter Glas, voormalig voorzitter van de Unie van Waterschappen en Dijkgraaf van Waterschap de Dommel. Na onze ontmoeting op de Waterschapsdag 2016 in Den Haag was hij zeer bereid om mij te helpen om in contact te komen met verschillende respondenten. Hartelijk dank daarvoor.

Grote dank gaat ook uit naar Maarten van der Sloot, voormalig beleidsmedewerker bij de VNG, maar vooral ook goede vriend. Toen ik nog hevig op zoek was naar een geschikte case om mijn theorie op te los te laten heeft hij mij het OESO rapport gesuggereerd als geschikt object van studie en uiteindelijk heb ik mijn scriptie rondom dit rapport heen gebouwd. Verder heb ik ook gebruik kunnen maken van zijn netwerk binnen de VNG en het Ministerie. Maarten, bedankt!

Heel blij ben ik ook met de kundige begeleiding van Sebastiaan Princen. De feedback was altijd zeer constructief en je suggesties hielpen me altijd verder. Verder ook grote dank voor het geduld met mij en mijn persoonlijke scriptie-perikelen waardoor ik het mezelf vaak onnodig lastig heb gemaakt. Ook dank ik Ann Rigney voor haar feedback, met name op het gebied van de correcte conceptualisatie en toepassing van cultural memory theorie, alsmede haar feedback op spelling en grammatica.

Tot slot bedank ik Judith, voor al je onvoorwaardelijke steun en liefde.

## Management Summary

This thesis connects cultural memory theory with policy analysis. Cultural memory theory is a well-developed concept within Memory Studies, but its application within the field of Public Administration is limited. The theoretical part of this thesis investigates the added value of a cultural memory approach to policy analysis.

The main element of cultural memory theory contains the assumption that individual acts of remembrance occur in a socio-cultural environment. Subsequently, the creation of shared versions of the past are products of mediation, textualization and acts of communication (Rigney, 2005). Simply stated, the memories we have do not solely belong to ourselves, but are part of the communicated memories of the groups we belong and in which we live and work. Furthermore, these communicated versions of the past help us to construct our identity and answer the question 'who are we and who are the others'. Subsequently, this influences our actions.

Policy-makers that are concerned with a certain field of policy can be viewed as a group or a community with their own shared versions of the past and own stories of what it means to be part of the policy community. Within those communities, references to the past are made to make a point. These references can be found in written text or oral communication. They can also happen tacitly, considering the tendency of writing policy in neutral and often technocratic terms. However, these appearances may be deceiving. Using a cultural memory approach in analysing policy processes can help us to elucidate the (often subtle) memory dynamics as a factor of influence on policy.

The second part of this thesis aims to test the theory by applying a cultural memory approach on a case study. Central in this case study are the perceptions, reactions and underlying considerations of the Dutch water management community regarding three recommendations, made by the OECD in their report '*Water Governance in the Netherlands: Fit for the Future?*'. Regarding the underlying considerations, specific attention is paid to the role of cultural memory dynamics.

In the case study, it is shown that explicit references to the past are made by members of the policy community when a recommendation challenges their identity in a fundamental way and hence influences policy outcomes. Here, the added value of a cultural memory approach becomes very clear and gives us insight and understanding regarding the reasons why a certain policy is adopted or not. These parts of policy reality would not be understood by using a different approach, making cultural memory theory a valuable addition to existing streams of literature on policy analysis.

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## List of abbreviations

English abbr.	Stands for:	Dutch abbr.	Stands for
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development	OESO	Organisatie voor Economische Samenwerking en Ontwikkeling
NAAW	National Administrative Agreement on Water	BAW	Bestuursakkoord Water
DWA	Dutch Water Authorities	UVW	Unie van Waterschappen
ADM	Association of Dutch Municipalities	VNG	Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten



## Reading Guide

- Chapter 1 introduces the research problem and the research question. A first argument is made why it would be interesting to connect cultural memory with policy analysis and why the Dutch water management community is an interesting case to study from this angle. Also the scientific and societal relevance of this study is addressed.
- Chapter 2 is the theoretical chapter. Firstly, different approaches for analyzing policy are addressed and why it is understandable that a cultural memory approach has become relevant considering developments towards social-constructivism. Secondly, the origin of the concept of cultural memory is addressed and how it is refined and conceptualized by contemporary scholars. Thirdly, the concept is connected with policy analysis and how cultural memory can be used for policy analysis. Fourthly, the links between cultural memory theory and existing streams of literature in the field of Public Administration are investigated
- Chapter 3 addresses the research design and the used methods regarding the empirical part of this thesis. The way the research is conducted is explained and also the limitations of this study are addressed.
- The aim of chapter 4 is to give a short oversight on the field of Dutch water management. How did it developed over time and how does it looks like today, which tasks are performed and which parties are involved are the questions that are central in this chapter. Furthermore, the trend towards water governance (instead of water government) is addressed.
- In chapter 5 the empirical findings and the analysis are presented. The chapter is structured around the three OECD recommendations that are central in the case study. Attention is paid to the policy community's perceptions, reactions and underlying considerations. Furthermore, the role of cultural memory dynamics within those underlying considerations is investigated. Expect lots of quotes from policy makers and the researcher's interpretation of it.
- In chapter 6 the conclusions of this thesis are presented. The empirical conclusions are about the case itself. The theoretical conclusions move away from the case by addressing how the case gives insight regarding the influence of cultural memory dynamics on policy processes. Finally, in the discussion there will be reflected on the implications of this study for the field of Public Administration and which new questions are raised by this study for future research.

## 1. 'Water management, polder-model and cultural memory'

### 1.1 Cultural memory approach for policy analysis

What happens in the process between initiation and the final outcome of policy cases is a well-studied subject in the field of policy analysis. Different approaches have been developed to understand how certain policies have been formed and what mechanisms influence the specific policy-making stages and hence the final outcome. Through time it became clear that understanding policy processes is not just a matter of only analyzing the *content* of policy. The focus on 'objective' problems, alternatives and possible solutions ignores for instance the influence of stakeholder behavior in the policy community. This behavior is shaped by ideas, politics and culture, both consciously and unconsciously. These political and cultural approaches focus on the mechanisms of influence that are often socially constructed, for instance (political) interests, power-play, sense-making, beliefs, and the norms of the involved stakeholders. The consequence of such cultural and/or political approaches is that the process of policy-making, as well as policies themselves, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the ideas or understandings that policy-makers hold themselves. *'We make sense of the world: we are meaning-making creatures. Our social institutions, our policies, our agencies are human creations, not objects independent of us.'* (Yanow, p. 5). Thus, in order to understand certain policies it is important to understand the *people* within the respective policy communities.

So far nothing new here. However, in addition to those approaches that take the socially constructed reality into account, an important element is still overlooked in the field of Public Administration, namely the influence of cultural memory. According to cultural memory theorists, memory should be understood as the actors' subjective representation of the past in the present. These individual representations, whether they are historically legitimate or not, are connected with memories. Memories operate within the framework of a social-cultural environment, making individual and cultural memories mutually dependent. Within this environment, narratives are produced, shared and reproduced. They circulate and can become part of the language system within the specific framework. These constructed cultural memories influence the actors' image of identity (*who are we and who are the others?*) and hence their behavior and actions<sup>1</sup>. This makes the connection between cultural memory theory and policy processes relevant and it is interesting to study how cultural memory plays a role in policy cases. Therefore, cultural memory theory could be a valuable addition to already existing approaches that try to analyze both policy processes and outcomes.

When we want to study policy processes from a cultural memory perspective, a first problem that immediately arises is how to determine when it is useful to employ such an approach. Every institution and every actor that operate within those institutions somehow have their own collection of shared memories, making 'memory' a rather broad and hard-to-grasp concept. Vigilance is required when employing such an approach, because *'it is important to be aware of the direction and degree of the transfer of meaning, the productivity of the trope for the specific research question, and also the chance that the logic of the figurative term could lead us astray.'* (Erl, 2011, p. 101). In other words – applied to policy analysis - a researcher should estimate whether a cultural memory approach is

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<sup>1</sup> A more extended description of the concept of cultural memory and its connections with policy analysis will be elaborated on in the theoretical framework, chapter 2.

useful when analyzing policy cases or whether it would be more productive to adopt a different approach.

In order to determine whether the use of cultural memory perspective is worthwhile for analyzing cases, two criteria should be met. First, the researcher should have a hunch that a certain policy case is 'laden' with memory. This means that along the path on which a certain policy has developed and redeveloped, specific references to the past should have important influence regarding the content of the policy. The researcher should have a hunch that these references to the past are memories being used to make sense of the present. Since the researcher is also part of the social-cultural environment in which these memories operate, his hunch is therefore more than a wild guess.

The necessity of this hunch lies in the fact that memory dynamics happen tacitly and are often not directly visible. The language of policy communities tends to be highly rational and technocratic, which implies at first sight that subjective and/or sentimental considerations connected with memory dynamics are not part of the policy-making process. Policy communities base their claim to policy-making authority on expertise, not sentiment. Although the policy debates and the produced policy documents are conducted in a very rational and technical manner, appearances can be deceptive. The absence of sentimental considerations within policy documents does not necessarily mean that memories are not part of policy processes. Policies are not created in a cultural-political vacuum, because policy communities themselves are part of a broader social-cultural environment in which different ideas are debated and different interests are represented, in which intentionally or unintentionally events are remembered or forgotten.

Secondly, the case for using a cultural memory perspective becomes even stronger when these references to the past are actually found in written policy documents between the just mentioned rational and technocratic lines. Although the connection between those references and the rational considerations may not be very clear at first sight, it could give an indication of the present influence of memories on the policy community and hence the content of policy.

In the next part of this chapter I will discuss a policy case in which the role of memories seems to be present in a policy case.

## **1.2 The case of Dutch water management policy**

In 2014 the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a report on the current state of Dutch water governance. The general tone of the report was mainly laudatory regarding the way the Netherlands managed and financed their water to date. Although praising the Netherlands for their results in the past, the OECD also made some critical remarks. The OECD doubts that some of the current ways regarding water governance are up to date and suitable for future water management challenges, both financially and environmentally.

1. First, they observed a striking lack of awareness among Dutch citizens regarding water safety risks and their knowledge about measurements during water hazards, while it is the challenge to keep citizens well-informed and alert, especially in light of climate change and hence increasing water risks. When the public is well-informed about water risks, government can influence their decisions regarding to what extent they expose

themselves to those risks and thereby reduce the expected costs of damages in a flood event. Also, by decreasing the awareness gap, government can secure the willingness to pay for flood safety in the future (OECD report, 2014). Thus, the OECD recommends the water management organizations to narrow the awareness gap in order to tackle those challenges by facilitating access to information on water costs, risks and performance and be transparent about it.

2. Secondly, they concluded that the Dutch government could make more effort in managing their water operations cost-efficiently (OECD report, 2014). This is caused by the fact that in the current Dutch tax system, a big share of the additional costs related to water management are borne by the whole population instead of by the stakeholders that benefit directly from certain investments<sup>2</sup>. The negative version of this OECD preferred principle is ‘the polluter pays’ principle, which should give the involved stakeholders incentives to manage their water more cost-efficiently and more environmental friendly as well. The OECD recommends the Dutch government to shore up their finance system by looking thoroughly to which costs can be allocated more specifically to categories of polluters and benefiter, in order to create more economic incentives for polluters to pollute less.
3. A third point of critique is the Dutch reliance on a system of many checks and balances, *without* having a third party that oversees all the other water institutions independently. In the current situation the involved partners (such as the ministry, water boards, the association of municipalities) are united within the National Administrative Agreement on Water (Bestuursakkoord Water, 2011) The absence of an independent party brings risks of information asymmetry and monopolistic behavior. The OECD recommends the strengthening of accountability mechanisms. *‘This can contribute to bridging multi-level governance gaps in terms of cost efficiency and financial performance, accountability and stakeholders’ awareness’* (OECD, p. 24).

While the second criticism regards an issue of equity and the third criticism one of accountability, all three phenomena are linked to (a lack of) transparency. The argumentation of the OECD is that increase in transparency kills multiple birds with one stone. On the one hand, a more equitable allocation of costs, meaning that those who generate the costs for the community should bear them too, should strengthen the economic incentives for managing water (quality, quantity and risks) more efficiently. On the other hand, independent oversight also contributes to transparency and visibility (not least for end users) regarding water taxes, costs, risks and performances of the several involved partners and hence gives incentives to manage water more efficiently as well. To make the circle round again, this contribution to transparency and visibility should also narrow the awareness gap.

The OECD report did not go unnoticed. Regarding the finances, the minister want to adopt the recommendations: *‘Als algemene richting voor de discussie steun ik daarbij het principe dat degenen die profijt*

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<sup>2</sup> Twijnstra & Gudde report: ‘In de huidige financiering zijn weinig expliciet gedragsbeïnvloedende financiële prikkels aanwezig; slechts bij een aantal watertaken en -diensten wordt jaarlijks echt afgerekend op de mate van gebruik (denk aan de drinkwaterrekening) of kostenveroorzaking (denk aan zuiveringsheffing voor bedrijven). Dit is opvallend omdat de grondslagen van veel watertaken en -diensten wel kunnen worden aangemerkt als het kostenveroorzakingsprincipe of het vervuiler/gebruiker betaalt principe’ (Twijnstra & Gudde, 2015, p.6)

*hebben of ingrepen doen die effect hebben op het waterbeheer (...) ook de daarbij behorende kosten dragen (gebruiker/vervuiler betaalt principe)*' (ibid. p. 4) The Ministry of Infrastructure took action and did a follow-up study on the distribution and the costs and who pays the bill. One of the main conclusions is that the existing financial arrangements to fund all the water management costs are aligned with the solidarity principle (instead of for instance the polluter pays principle) and that the arrangements have (almost) no explicit influence on the behavior of consumers/users (Twijnstra & Gudde, 2015). Whether this should be changed is of course subject of political debate. Considering the awareness gap among Dutch citizens, the Ministry took action too, by adopting the ambition that citizens will be more aware about water opportunities and water threats in their surrounding area (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2016) In order to raise awareness, a mobile-app was launched, informing Dutch citizens about water risks in their region<sup>3</sup>.

While the OECD's recommendations regarding narrowing the awareness gap and adjusting the finance system seems to have led to action, the Dutch government seems to ignore the recommendation regarding institutional reforms that concern independent oversight. Although the minister said in her reaction to the report 2014: *Mijn Bestuursakkoord Water partners en ik hechten aan transparantie. Daarom wil ik samen met deze partners verkennen hoe we efficiëncy bij watermanagement processen beter zichtbaar en transparanter kunnen maken*' (Beleidsreactie, 2014, p. 7), no specific action regarding institutional reform was taken. On the contrary, in 2015 the Ministry stated: *Het kabinet onderschrijft de conclusie van de OESO dat de organisatiestructuur in het waterbeheer goed functioneert. Het kabinet ziet dan ook geen reden om bestuurlijke of organisatorische veranderingen in het water voor te stellen*' (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2015). It appears that the Dutch government is not particularly benevolent when it comes to institutional reforms and therefore ignored the recommendations that specifically addressed those reforms.

A possible explanation for this peculiar turn of events can be found in a specific Dutch approach regarding water management and hence a specific Dutch design of water management institutions. This approach is deeply linked with current representations of Dutch history and administrative tradition. This is where the previously mentioned and so-called 'hunch' regarding the influencing role of cultural memory dynamics comes into play. Indeed, the OECD acknowledges the existence of this approach: a *'culture of voluntary agreements and consensus building'* (p. 259). The main character of this approach is to solve common problems in a sphere of 'togetherness' with government as just one of the partners. Thus, the existence of such an approach is a possible explanation for the absence of an independent monitoring party. The approach is known as the Polder Model. Before turning to the research problem and research question, the distinctive features of this model will be discussed shortly in the next paragraph, as well as its origin and its connections with Dutch history, memory and identity.

### 1.3 The Polder model

As mentioned above, a reference to the past, specifically to the polder model, is made by the OECD (which is not a Dutch organization). In their report this reference implies a certain administrative culture that is part of the polder model. Although 'polder' and the verb 'polderen'

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.overstroomik.nl/>

refers to the centuries old approach to reclaiming land by building dykes and draining swamps in the Netherlands, the word 'polder model' originates from a more recent period. Polder model refers to the Dutch deliberative economy (in Dutch: overlegeconomie) in the eighties and nineties, in which consultations between employers and employees organizations took place in order to establish stable wage structures, while the government acted as a facilitating partner of this process. The outcome of those consultations were successful and the verb 'polderen' became fashionable as a specific way of describing the reaching of consensus between all the involved stakeholders, which had often opposing interests.

But why then is it called the polder model, and not for instance the consultation- or consensus model? One part of the answer is that it was a matter of political/strategical purposes, whereby the idea of 'polderen' is used as a metaphor in which all stakeholder could relate and thus as a vehicle for uniting the employers and employees (Te Velde, 2007). However, this could only be successful if the polder metaphor appealed to actual understandings of Dutch identity among Dutch citizens.

Two Dutch dictionaries describe the term polder model as follows, namely *'the Dutch economic system in which consultations between social partners and moderate wage development are central'* (Van Dale present-day Dutch) and *'consultation model aiming at consensus and harmony, as was used in the Netherlands in the nineties of the twentieth century'* (Van Dale, fourteenth edition). The word *polder model* however seems to imply that there is more to it than just a deliberative economy model. Polder model suggests naturally *'centuries of continuity and evokes the image of the Dutch identity that would be characterized by the joint fight against water'* (Bos et al, 2007), in which 'polder' refers to a medieval event where the joint fight against water started, namely the process of land reclamation that required cooperation and consensus between all inhabitants in order to succeed. The polder model connects the deliberative economy and the aim of consensus and harmony directly to the inhabitants identity by using the term 'polder', which refers to the century-old relationship of practically all Dutch citizens with water, in the sense that the majority of the population lives below sea-level. This is also referred to in the National Administrative Agreement on Water (2011) that starts with *'The Netherlands is a water country. We live with water and water is beautiful. We keep our land safe against floods'*.

Thus, the term Polder Model, although originating from the Dutch deliberative economy in the eighties (and the term coming in vogue in the nineties) seems to apply to much more than just to the domain of economy. Frits van Oostrom, a Dutch historian, stated that it refers to a deep tradition which brought the Dutch people as where they are now (Oostrom, 2007). It refers to an all-embracing distinctive *habitus* of the Dutch citizen, whose culture and society is permeated with congregating, consulting, discussion in order to accomplish consensus (Ebben, 2007), which was already necessary long-ago for uniting the different classes of nobility, aristocrats and farmers in order to reclaim land from the sea and keep their collective feet dry. Through time, the voices of these different stakeholders became institutionalized in many governmental organizations. Nowadays, *'Dutch water management relies on multi-stakeholder co-ordination and co-operation, including a variety of interest groups, organizations and policy areas in decision-making processes. Consultation and co-operation with different levels of governmental, private sector and not-for-profit organizations is key to set converging targets in a highly fragmented sector'* (OESO, p. 260). Central government is just one of the partners in

achieving water management targets, due to the historical development of water governing institutions, which were (and still are) mainly organized on a decentral level. This relates to Henk te Velde's description of the polder model: '*an institutional structure and a spirit of peaceful consultation in which all stakeholders are involved based on equality, don't unilaterally enforce conclusions and pragmatically acknowledge (societal) pluralism*' (Te Velde, 2007, p. 10) In that sense, the polder model relates to both formal structures as well as to informal rules of tradition, namely how stakeholders (should) behave in order to achieve targets that are supported by all stakeholders.

Summing up, the term polder model became fashionable in the nineties regarding the consultations between employers and employees, but appeals to much more than just the economical domain. It is deeply rooted in Dutch history and identity and it refers to events that are centuries old. Regarding the water management sector, it appeals to a governance culture which is actualized in the institutional design. The main character of this approach is to solve common problems in a sphere of 'togetherness' with central government as just one of the partners.

However, the Polder Model refers mostly to something that is much harder to grasp, namely a feeling, a mentality and a part of the Dutch identity regarding 'the way how we manage, the way how we administrate and how we fix problems', just like at the start of the joint fight against water when the first lands were reclaimed and Polders came to be.

Whether this connection is historically correct is highly questionable (Bos et al, 2007), but what seems to be clear is that the polder model evokes a lot of images that are representations of the past and may even influence identity of policy-makers and hence policy processes and decisions. It is that what cultural memory is all about, namely the *representation* of the past in the present. This thesis investigates how insights of cultural memory theory can help us to understand policy processes.

#### 1.4 Research problem and research question

Let us turn back to the OECD report. The critical remarks of the OECD regarding the awareness gap, financial arrangements and independent oversight are linked to ideas about good governance. As an international organization that is somewhat distant from everyday administrative culture and practices of national governments, it is understandable that the OECD's ideas about good governance are ideal formats. However, governments are not operating in a vacuum and their policies and institutional designs are not created in a vacuum either. They are developed over time and linked with history and tradition, hence with ideas about good governance that are connected with their past and kept alive by the members of policy communities that are working within all those governmental organizations by communication.

The Polder model or Polder approach seems to be one of those ideas and plays a role in the process of making water management policy. It seems to be actualized in their institutional design, their finance system, but also in 'a way of how we do things'. It seems to be present in Dutch water institutions and decision-making processes. The 'Polder-approach' with its distinctive features thus can be seen as a strong cultural memory that is present within a policy



community. Therefore, the Dutch policy community concerned with water management is a very suitable case to investigate how memory dynamics exert influence on policy processes.

The recommendations of the OECD seem to challenge the Polder-approach, in particular the recommendations regarding institutional reform. As outlined above, part of the institutional design of the polder model is that government acts as one of the stakeholders, without having an independent party that monitors all the other stakeholders. This is one of the critical remarks that the OECD made in light of the question whether the Dutch water management is fit for the future. The OECD states that although the polder model has proved its worth in the past, it is questionable whether the current institutional design is appropriate for tackling future problems, as well as meeting the requirements of good and effective governance.

According to the OECD, financial and institutional reform is desirable. However, the main characteristic of the Polder Model is that all stakeholders operate as equals (more or less). The OECD's call for an independent monitoring party challenges this. This would not have been problematic, were it not that the polder model is not a matter of institutional design only, but also laden with memories about what it means to be Dutch, to be part of the Dutch water management sector and how the Dutch solved *their* water problems in the past till to date. From a cultural memory perspective it is interesting to what extent the memory of the polder-approach is present among policy-makers and how the remembrance of this approach exerts influence on how policy-makers deal with those challenges.

In light of the above, the research question of this thesis is as follows:

How does the remembrance of the polder model influence ideas about good water governance in the Netherlands?

In order to answer the research question, theoretical, contextual and empirical sub questions are formulated. The theoretical sub questions address the exploration of the links between cultural memory theory and policy analysis, while the contextual and empirical sub questions concern the case study on which the theoretical framework is 'tested'.

- Theoretical sub-questions (Chapter 2):

1. *How can we understand the development of different approaches towards policy analysis and the connection with cultural memory theory?*

The first sub-question is theoretical and addresses an overview of different approaches towards policy analysis. It describes the development from positivistic/instrumental approaches towards more interpretive perspectives on policy analysis. The aim of this sub-question is to describe how we can understand this development and how cultural memory theory is a logical next step in the ways policy processes can be studied in relation to scientific developments in ideas about knowledge and how social reality can be studied.



2. *What is a cultural memory approach on policy analysis?*

The second sub-question builds on the first and delves deeper into the theoretical assumptions regarding cultural memory theory. The aim of this sub-question is to outline the concept of cultural memory, its key assumptions and how it can be connected with policy analysis.

3. *What is the added value of cultural memory theory to policy analysis?*

The aim of this sub question is to investigate the added value of the cultural memory perspective in comparison with already existing approaches towards policy analysis.

▪ Contextual sub-question (Chapter 4):

1. *How does the system of Dutch water management work and how has it developed over time?*

This subquestion is contextual and describes how the field of Dutch water management looks like and how it develops over time. It also addresses recent trends and challenges that the Dutch water policy community has faces in order to understand the occasion for the publication of the OECD report.

▪ Empirical sub-questions (Chapter 5):

1. *How did the Dutch water policy community perceive the OECD recommendations*

2. *How did the Dutch water policy community react to the OECD recommendations and which ideas/interests influenced their considerations?*

3. *What were the underlying considerations?*

Sub-questions 4-6 are both empirical and analytical. The questions are focused on the case study of the Dutch water policy community. The data is derived from interviews and document analysis. In order to understand if and how cultural memory dynamics play a role, a distinction is made between perceptions, reactions and underlying considerations<sup>4</sup>, because cultural memory dynamics can play a role in all these stages of policy implementation, alongside other dynamics which do not necessarily have to be connected with memory.

4. *What is the role of cultural memory in those considerations? (Chapter 5 and conclusion)*

The last sub-question addresses how and to what extent underlying considerations from members of the policy community are connected with cultural memory and how it influenced the policy process.

## 1.5 Scientific and societal relevance

The scientific relevance of this thesis is first of all the connection between the field of cultural memory studies and public administration. This thesis is an attempt to bridge insights from cultural memory studies with insights from the field of public administration, specifically policy analysis. The added value for policy analysis are insights regarding how policy makers and hence policy processes are making use of memories to make sense of the present and how this affects

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3.2 (Methodological chapter) for further explanation regarding these specific distinctions of perceptions, reactions and considerations

policy-making. By applying a cultural memory perspective on policy, this thesis explores how policy processes can be understood even better alongside already existing social constructivist approaches and contribute to answers on the question how cultural memory dynamics influence policy.

By doing this, this thesis is also an attempt to contribute to literature debates within the field of Public Administration about the role of historical analogies. Historical analogies already is a well-developed theme within policy analysis studies, but these analogies focus mainly on crisis events (e.g. wars, disasters). By using a cultural memory approach towards policy analysis, attention is paid to the more subtle and tacit influence of memories on the more ‘daily’ policy processes. Furthermore, this thesis can add to discussions that are present in actual institutionalism theories. Where rational choice institutionalism is weak on explaining stability and historical institutionalism is weak on explaining change, cultural memory theory can add to insights about the mechanisms that inform change or stability in different contexts<sup>5</sup>.

This thesis also contributes to insights on the methodological level, because a part is devoted to the establishment of an analytical framework in which it is outlined how different kind of research questions apply to different elements of the concept of cultural memory. This informs future scholars of public administration regarding the design of their research and the different possibilities to go at analyzing policy processes from a cultural memory perspective. Furthermore, these insights can also inform scholars from other disciplines if they are able to translate the analytical framework to their own field of interest<sup>6</sup>.

Taking into account the explorative character of this study, the societal relevance of this thesis is less relevant than the scientific. However, policy makers still can benefit from insights that are derived from the case study that is part of this thesis. Members of the Dutch water policy community can – in response to the outcome of this thesis – assess to what extent they recognize the role of memories in their policy field. This thesis can help to elucidate the memory dynamics and hence help policy makers to take its influence into account when making or implementing future policies.

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<sup>5</sup> In chapter 2.3 ‘Links with existing policy analysis literature’ there will be elaborated further on how a cultural memory theory can contribute to literature and theoretical discussion in the PA field.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 2 in general, but specifically 2.2.5 ‘Conceptual refinement’ relates to the methodological value of this thesis.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Connecting cultural memory theory with policy analysis

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

When policy-makers refer to an event in the past to make a point, they use memory to make sense of the present. These memories are often not solely belonging to the individual policy maker, but part of a collection of representations of the past, which are shared within the communities in which policy makers operate and interact. Cultural memories can exert a powerful influence over the way policy communities perceive problems and potential solutions. This chapter investigates how policy analysis is connected with cultural memory and, furthermore, how policy analysis can benefit from a certain approach.

Memory studies is a well-established field of research. Founding father of the field of memory studies is Maurice Halbwachs, when he introduced his concept of *collective memory* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Later, the concept is refined and changed to *cultural memory*, in which more attention is paid to acts of communication and the mediating effects of stories, media and people who interact in groups. The insights of the concept are applied within different fields of academia, for instance history, psychology, literary and media studies. However, within the field of political studies or public administration, its application of the concept of cultural memory is limited. In this chapter the added value of cultural memory theory to the field of public administration, specifically to policy analysis, will be discussed.

When placed into context, the connection between cultural memory theory and policy analysis is quite understandable. Through time, policy analysis approaches adopted social-constructivist elements to account for less-rational behaviour. Cultural memory theory on the other hand is one of the outcomes of the development towards social-constructivism within the academic field of history and philosophy. I will address this in the first chapter. In the second chapter I will address Halbwach's concept of collective memory more extensively by discussing its origin and its development. In order to make the concept suitable for a connection with policy analysis, I will firstly delve deeper into a conceptual refinement of cultural memory by discussing analytical distinctions, drawing heavily on Erll. Secondly the links between cultural memory theory and other streams of literature will be explored in chapter 3. This will lead to a first attempt to develop an approach for analysing policy from a cultural memory perspective, using insights from both cultural memory theory and institutional theory. After combining cultural memory theory with policy analysis I will discuss the added value in the last chapter.

#### 2.1.2 Policy analysis and cultural memory: why now?

On first sight, the connection between policy analysis and cultural memory theory seems a bit random. In this chapter, I want to begin explaining why this is not the case by placing the connection between memory studies and policy analysis into context. Just as approaches towards policy analysis developed over time - because assumptions about knowledge and human behaviour changed over time too - so did cultural memory theory. Cultural memory theory is a concept that gained renewed attention in the past decades. When placed in context, the connection between policy analysis and cultural memory theory is quite natural. I will address this by first giving a brief overview of how policy analysis approaches developed. Secondly, I will

address the similarities between developments regarding policy approaches and broader developments within academia, which influenced conceptual understandings regarding memory and history. These similarities show that the connection between policy analysis and memory theory is quite logical.

### 2.1.3 The rationality project and its shortcomings

The classic model for policy making is the rational decision-making model, in which policy outcomes are the products of deliberative and purposeful choices (Bovens et al, 2001, p. 86). The model should be understood as a prescription for good policy outcomes, but also as a structuring model that divides policy making into clear-cut stages. Policy in this model is made according to well-defined steps in order to solve well-identified problems. Stone (2002) calls this the rationality project, which includes the following clear-cut stages: an issue is placed on the agenda, problems are defined, the issue moves through legislative branches of the government, solutions and alternatives are proposed and analysed. At the end of the last stage the chosen solution is implemented by executive agencies and finally the issue is evaluated (which provides means to revise solutions for 'better' policies; this gives potential for starting the whole process again). In that sense, '*policy can be presented as apolitical because it appeals to seemingly neutral scientific reasoning...*' (Wedel et al, 2005, p.37). Fundamental to this prescriptive and normative approach are two beliefs: first that we can *know* problems and solutions in an objective and undisputed way and hence the belief that by using that objective knowledge humanity can progress and control that progress completely.

Over time it became clear that the forming of policy could not be aligned according to the idealistic rational decision-making model. Furthermore – because of the prescriptive character of the rational decision-making model - this classic model is not sufficient for explaining or understanding policy processes and outcomes either. The main critique regarding the classic rational decision-making model is that it fails to capture the complex dynamics of human behaviour, although these are definitely present during the process of policy making. These dynamics include the struggle over ideas (Stone, 2002) that are logically subjective and based on beliefs. The rational-decision model was not suitable for explaining why certain policies were perceived as successful or desirable for one group, but perceived as failing or unattractive for another. Intertwined with this are the dynamics of power, for instance the will to survive and hold certain positions. This leads to the collision between the opposing interests of different actors (Bovens et al, 2001) in the several arena's where policy making takes place. Policy makers do not operate in a vacuum where they can produce 'good' policy, because all these kind of dynamics causes the involved stakeholders to act not only purely in terms of 'objective' problems and solutions, but also to act strategically in order to serve individual or group interests.

### 2.1.4 Towards models for explaining and understanding policy processes

In order to understand and explain the influence of these kinds of human behaviour within the process of policy making, new policy-making theories emerged, for instance to account for why policy decisions are often the outcomes of framing, power play or even chaos and coincidence. Besides considering the phases that are logically ordered in the rational decision-making model, these new models and theories emphasized the more subjective side of policy making. This also brought a more humble position regarding the human capacity to be in control and the extent in when our analysis gives us the ability to predict future policy processes.

A typical example of a model that takes the dynamics of human behaviour into account is the *agenda-setting theory*. One could say that agenda setting theory is concerned with the birth of policy processes and decisions. The model is used for explaining why the agenda is composed as it is and why it changes (Kingdon, 2003). *In its most elementary form, agenda-setting theory stresses that what is being talked about depends on who is doing the talking*' (Princen, 2009, p.10). Instead of focusing on the outcome, this perspective focuses on how issues got on the agenda in the first place. It builds on the assumption that people cannot attend to an infinite number of things at the same time. Hence, the number of issues that the public (in the broadest sense) considers to be important is limited. This means that specific issues have to struggle for public attention in order to get on the agenda of decision-makers. Of course, issues themselves cannot struggle, but people with interests can. In order to explain why a certain policy is adopted or will be adopted in the future, one should focus on the phase of agenda setting within the process of policy making, specifically by looking at who is controlling the agenda, as well who is controlling access to the agenda. Important here is how certain issues are defined, by whom and in which institutional decision-making arenas this takes place (Princen, 2009).

To some extent agenda setting theory is still connected with the classic rational-decision model in the sense that it acknowledges and builds on the clear-cut stages of policy making. However, those stages should be understood in a descriptive manner; it creates some structure in the complex world in which policy-making takes place. It diverges from the rational-decision model in the sense that it does not prescribe what good or bad policy is or how it can be obtained. Instead, it focuses on human behaviour regarding agenda-setting and hence tries to understand and explain how this affects policy processes and outcomes. Agenda-setting theory acknowledges that we often cannot control what is happening 'out there', but that stakeholders can influence the way we talk about it by controlling the agenda's, as well as access to those agenda's. The agenda setting theory takes the subjective character of knowledge into account, for instance by addressing the concept of framing. Thus, agenda setting theory diverges from the classic notion of the rational-decision making model when it comes to prescribing how policy should be made and that neutral scientific reasoning is the key to accomplish good policy in an objective manner.

This change of character of policy analysis theory is not a development in itself, but should be understood in a much broader scientific development regarding our beliefs about the essence of knowledge and how we can obtain it. I will address this development in the next section, but for now it is important to note that the influences of this paradigm shift manifest themselves in the development of policy analysis theories. To state it very boldly and briefly, the shift towards the appreciation of the subjective character of knowledge leaves its traces and blends within already existing theories of policy analysis. Both elements of objective (stages of policy making) and subjective characteristics of knowledge (like framing) can be seen within the example of agenda-setting theory.

### [2.1.5 Interpretive approach to policy analysis](#)

A perspective that moves even more away from the notion that we can objectively study and report on policy processes is the interpretive approach. This approach assumes that problems and solutions do not objectively exist in the world, like apples and pears do. What does exist is only our interpretation of it. *We make sense of the world: we are meaning-making creatures. Our social institutions, our policies, our agencies are human creations, not objects independent of us* (Yanow, 1996, p. 5).

Policy, in that sense, never has a unitary meaning, even after it has been carefully formulated by policy-makers. The different stages in policy making (to the extent we can recognize policy making as a linear process) and the language, texts and symbols that are being used during those stages are not neutral or instrumental. On the contrary, they are the constructions of our interpretations, often the interpretations of specific groups who share the same 'subcultural' language.

This position towards policy also puts policy in perspective as just one of the many narratives that create meaning for people. The outcome of policy processes does not necessarily mean that other people perceive the policy the same way. This means that policy analysis should not only be focused on trying to explain predictive laws or rules behind human behaviour, societal problems and hence its solutions. The analysis then should be about the values, beliefs, texts, language and symbols being used by the different groups that are concerned with a certain policy (Yanow, 1996) in order to get a deeper *understanding* of what is really going on. Another example of an interpretive approach refers to the interaction of policy outcomes with social reality and (unintended) side effects, for instance how policy can shape and reshape identities (Wedel, 2005). Also, a normative stance comes into play. With his anthropological perspective on policy making, Wedel calls for a critical assessment of the categories that policies impose on people in order to contribute to the evaluation of the justness of those policies. Here we can see that the interpretive approach takes a more distant and holistic viewpoint towards policy making than for instance the agenda-setting theory, which focuses solely on the world of policy making. Distant, because policies and their meanings are just one of the many narratives that give meaning and form identities. Holistic, because policy and the multiple meanings it can convey are heavily intertwined with interacting social groups, their histories and their identities.

At this point, the connection between memory studies and policy analysis comes into view. But before delving into the field of memory studies and what it can bring to the table regarding the analysis of policy processes, we need to address why and how memory studies became relevant in the first place.

### **2.1.6 Parallel developments within approaches towards history and memory**

This very brief (and therefore very limited) overview on ways to approach, explain and understand policy processes is useful to understand the connection between memory studies and policy analysis. We have seen that policy analysis developed from a rational starting point with objective knowledge towards a perspective that approaches reality as a constructed reality with only subjective interpretations. We've also seen how this development influenced existing streams of theory and how objective and subjective notions of knowledge are blended, for instance in the agenda setting theory.

But the shift towards a more social constructivist research approach, and hence the appreciation of the (inter)-subjective character of knowledge, is not limited to the analysis of policy only. It has its roots in some important philosophical paradigm shifts regarding fundamental presumptions about knowledge in the social sciences. The most important shift is the notion of the difference between knowledge produced in natural sciences and in the social sciences. Unlike the natural sciences, social science cannot produce theory with universal rules or laws that can be applied to every situation, because the objects of study are context dependent, socially constructed and



subjective (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The social sciences study people with beliefs, value-laden problems and should therefore offer clarifications and deliberations about social problems in order to contribute to fruitful *practical* solutions, without having the ambition to provide ultimate answers. Therefore, social sciences cannot emulate the way knowledge is produced in the natural sciences.

This idea that knowledge about the social world is constructed and subjective has also led to a groundbreaking shift in academic notion of the concepts of history and memory. *Insights into the constructed nature and narrativity of historiography and talk of the 'end of history' (Francis Fukuyama), or at least of the 'end of grand narratives' (Jean-Francois Lyotard), have undermined concepts of history as a monolithic 'cultural singular' (Reinhard Koselleck), as a given fact, or as a process of teleological progression' (Erl, 2011, p. 5).* The notion of the socially constructed nature of history and memory stems from the socially constructed nature of our own knowledge and our representation of it. This has led to an increasing fascination for memory studies within academia and nowadays a well-established topic for research in the disciplines of philosophy, history, psychology, literary and media studies.

A specific topic within memory studies is the topic of *collective memory*, with Maurice Halbwachs as founding father. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he already wrote his account of memory, stating that individual memory depends on social structures. However, only in the past decades, when the paradigm regarding the socially constructed nature of our knowledge has shifted, his work received renewed attention. Subsequently, the concept of collective memory was refined into cultural memory, in which the more culturally externalized forms of collective memory is central.

Although this concept is the subject of multi-disciplinary studies, it is very limitedly applied within the field of policy analysis. The main argument of this paper is that the concept of cultural memory could be a valuable addition to the social constructivist approaches for policy analysis in order to achieve a deeper understanding of it. In the next section of this paper I will discuss the concept of cultural memory and why it is a suitable concept for policy analysis.

## 2.2 Cultural memory and connection with policy analysis

### 2.2.1 The concept of cultural memory: a story

Maurice Halbwachs, the founder of the concept *collective memory* and hence cultural memory studies<sup>7</sup>, starts his work with a thought experiment (Halbwachs, 1980). The story goes like this: during several walks in London he is accompanied by distinct persons, telling him different things about the city. An architect tells him about the character of a city building, a historian tells him why a spot is historically noteworthy, a painter directs his attention to colours in the parks and a businessman takes him to shops and stores. After these accompanied walks, he takes a second walk on his own. Passing the buildings, spots, parks and shops for the second time, he recalls the experiences he had during the former walks with the different companions. Then, Halbwachs asks his readers the following intriguing question about his second walk that he took alone: *'Could it be said that I preserve of that tour only individual remembrances, belonging solely to me?'* The answer is no. When passing the various locations he visited before, he recalls the common experiences he had

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<sup>7</sup> While Halbwachs talked about subjective and shared memories in the term of 'collective memory', the concept is very much related to culture, in which identity, beliefs, practices and communication are important elements. This has led to the generally preferred term of cultural memory.

with his distinct companions. He concludes that he shares the same remembrance with other people. In fact, thinking of the people he spend his time with during the several walks he is helped by them in recalling a certain way of remembering regarding the experiences he shared with them. In other words; although he is alone in appearance, during his walk he re-enters in the viewpoints of his companions and the groups to which they belong.

This introductory story that Halbwachs tells us at the beginning of his work on collective memory touches upon the core elements of a social constructivist view of history, memory, remembrance and how these are linked with our own perceptions of identity and hence the groups to which we think we belong. The evolution of cultural memory in that sense should be seen as cultural processes that are happening within the different social frameworks of different groups. The concept of ‘cultural memory’ highlights the extent to which shared memories of the past are the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication (Rigney, 2005).

Let’s get back to the story again while we make it a little more complex. As was happening in the example of Halbwachs, he took the walk with the different companions and had his own individual experiences. Now suppose another person –let’s call him John Walker - took a walk with these same companions too like Halbwachs did and, right after that, then would have another walk with Halbwachs. During their time together, Walker and Halbwachs would share their former experiences and reflect on them. Both their stories about their time with the several walking companions would be the same to some extent, but would probably also differ on some points, for example if John Walker were an architect and was struck in a different way by the story of the architect companion than Halbwachs.

So which person then is ‘right’ regarding the experience they had? If Halbwachs and Walker would share their experiences, they would probably form a new remembrance of their walk through London, but the shape of their remembrance is influenced by *the way they shared it* and to what extent it shaped their ‘original’ experience of the first walk. In the words of the definition of Rigney (2005), the shared memory will be the product of *acts of communication* in this case.

Thus, from Halbwach’s example we learn that the forming of cultural memory happens through experiences, in which memories of a shared past are culturally constructed and *reconstructed in the present* through mediation, textualization and acts of communication regarding these experiences. Of course, cultural memory cannot exist as a supraindividual entity. However, the collective memory should be seen as the organic memory of the individual, which operates within the framework of a sociocultural environment (Erl, 2011). In that sense, individual memory and collective memory are mutually dependent: ‘*One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories*’ (Halbwachs, 1992, p.40).

This interplay between the individual and the group are two sides of the same coin that is *cultural memory*<sup>8</sup>. I will address this interplay later, as well the consequences of this ‘dualism’ for how to study cultural memory. But first I will address the origins of the concept and the relation between memory and history.

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<sup>8</sup> Here the necessary refinement of the concept *collective memory* becomes clear and why the term *cultural memory* is more suitable.



### 2.2.2 Objective history and subjective memory

Halbwachs' social constructivist view *avant la lettre* on collective memory differs from a positivistic view, which supposes that everything which ever happened is already fully formed and 'all there', like some sort of storehouse that is infinitely large. This positivistic view can be named as the model of 'original plenitude and subsequent loss' (Rigney, 2005), in which memories of the past have to be searched, resurrected and remembered in order to stay alive. From a positivistic view on history, there is in principle one truth about history and the task of historians is to uncover this truth in order to know 'what really happened'. The social constructivist view radically breaks with this view and states there is no truth, let alone a single truth, but only our (shared) constructions and reconstructions. The fundamental difference here is that cultural memory theorists assume a difference between factual history and meaning-giving memory. Both are constructed, but they serve different purposes.

The development of a social constructivist perspective on remembering can be understood in the light of the Romantic reaction on the Enlightenment. One of the most important characteristics of the Enlightenment is logocentrism: the valuation of reason and rationality over other criteria (Olick et al. 2011). According to logocentrism, societies are able to find truth with reason and rationality, hence can progress. This also fits perfectly in the rational decision-making policy making model, which describes and prescribes policy making according to the same principles. But first, let's delve deeper into cultural memory theory before jumping back to policy making.

Logocentrism has also major consequences regarding historical thinking, namely the belief that history is linear and not cyclical. From that view, history has a starting and ending point. By making progress using the criteria of reason and rationality, societies can get to the ultimate finish when they ultimately find objective truths. Studying history is one of the ways to find these truths. History in that sense can be written and known objectively. Thus, logocentrism is based on the belief that true knowledge is objective knowledge.

This brings us back to Rigney's model of plenitude and subsequent loss. When thinking of history as a massive store house in which 'objective' memories of the past are 'just there' (and getting dusty, because there are so many), then one could understand the act of remembering as entering a passive storage. While thinking of the past, one enters the memory archive in order to remember a specific memory that is lying on the memory shelves, waiting to be remembered. From that perspective, it does not matter who is the one that remembers, because the outcome should be the same if the logocentric principles are used correctly. In other words, by using reason and rationality one can write an objective account of history and therefore obtain true knowledge about the past. The logical consequence of this perspective is that there is only *one* history and *one* past, which is only distorted by human biases who often fail to see in a perfectly objective way. In this line of reasoning, the principles of logocentrism are the solution to filter out human subjectivism. Concluding, the Enlightenment with its objectivist accounts of history, memory and remembering places the object – the external memory that is 'out there' - to the centre of true knowledge.

On the contrary, the Romantic reaction on the Enlightenment contains an appreciation of the subjective and constructed character of knowledge, in which 'true knowledge' is relative. The subject, in this case the one who remembers, is more important here. The critique of the

objective account is that meaningful connections to our past seem to be waning, because the person who remembers is not important. However, this giving of meaning is the core of true knowledge about the world, according to the philosopher Bergson. Olick et al (2011) mention Bergson as one of the important figures who raised this so-called Romantic critique of the Enlightenment. *‘Against accounts of memory as passive storage, he characterized remembering as an active engagement. Against accounts of memory as the objective reproduction of the past, he characterized remembering as fluid and changing.’* (Olick et al, 2011, p. 17). Thus, memory and remembrance should be understood as a subjective activity and not as static phenomena that are ‘out there’, existing outside of ourselves.

### 2.2.3 Memory is constructed in the present and in the present constructed memory is collective

Bergson’s idea of the subjectivity *and hence variability of memory* inspired Halbwachs to write his account of cultural memory, which brings us back to the story at the beginning of this chapter. In his thought experiment he demonstrates that memories are meaningful in a subjective way. That is why Rigney proposes a different model of memory. Rather than the model of plenitude and subsequent loss, she argues for a model that is in line with the Romantic idea of subjective knowledge: *‘a social constructivist model that takes as its starting point the idea that memories of a shared past are culturally constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past’* (Rigney, 2005, p. 15). The ‘present-ness’ of the enterprise of remembering is one of the most fundamental differences with the objectivist perspective on memory. This has important consequences for how we can understand the present, our identities and hence our actions.

Thus, from Bergson we learn about his argument for the *subjective* character of memory that takes variable forms in the present and Halbwachs builds on these insights in explaining the *cultural* character of subjective memory. As we have seen in the story in the beginning, the reconstruction of memory is not an individual enterprise, but a cultural one. Although an individual remembers individually, the actual experience depends on others. *‘What this means, in effect, is that individual memory exists (...), but memory requires an enabling context’* (O’Callaghan, 2012, p 653).

### 2.2.4 Conceptual refinement

Right now we have a general idea about cultural memory, its origin and the development of the concept. We are almost ready for the jump from cultural memory theory towards policy analysis. But before that we need to further clarify the concept of cultural memory in order to get a better grip on how we can apply it on researching policy processes from a cultural memory perspective. Cultural memory is a broad, interdisciplinary umbrella term and is applied differently within different fields of research. In the next section I will draw heavily on Astrid Erll (2011), who made a great effort in making analytical distinctions in order to make the concept more suitable for studying it from different disciplinary angles. In the next section I will address the interplay between the individual and the collective level within the concept of cultural memory and how they could be separated analytically for policy research purposes.

One of the main criticisms that has been levelled against cultural memory theory addresses the presumed fallacy of transferring concepts of individual psychology to the collective level (Erll, 2011). Simply stated, the critique contains that just adding ‘collective’ to ‘memory’ does not make a so-called collective level of memory to exist and hence making cultural memory not a suitable

concept. Which is true to some extent, considering -as mentioned before- that only individuals can remember. From this critique a conceptual refinement of cultural memory was derived, which I see as a huge improvement regarding the credibility of the concept.

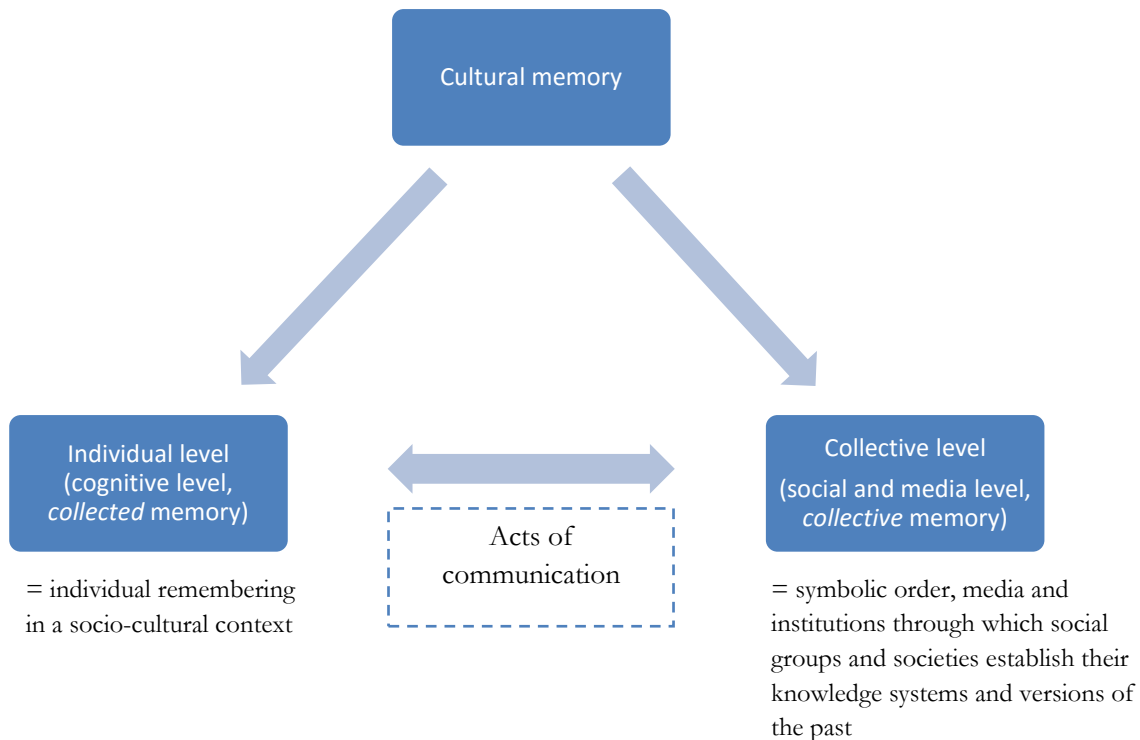
The collective level in cultural memory should not be understood as a literally existing entity, like we do with the individual human, their behaviours and their brains. The collective within cultural memory theory should be understood as a metaphor, as a *linguistic cognitive model with heuristic value* (ibid., p. 96). To make this sound less abstract, let me clarify this by using the well-known economic law of supply-and-demand as an example. Considering this law, nobody has ever seen the mechanism of supply and demand literally; nobody experienced the moment when he or she could say: 'I see the mechanism of collective supply and demand come together right now at this moment'. We experience demand and supply on the individual level (it is the individual that 'wants', like it is the individual who 'remembers'). However, we feel that this law (or model, theory, mechanism) somehow 'works' and is present on a collective level. Furthermore, from our experience we know that the model helps us interpreting economical transactions on a cultural level, which makes it a usable model with heuristic value. Also, one experiences it through acts of communication, when people talk about it with each other, or when they read about it in books, or when art is devoted to certain phenomena.

Although the individual and the collective level should be separated analytically, they interact continuously. On the one hand, '*there is no pre-cultural (or pre-cultural) individual memory*' (Erll, 2011, p. 98) which dismisses the critique mentioned above. Our memory is constructed and reconstructed through acts of communication, as we have seen in the example of Halbwachs story. On the other hand however, there cannot either be a cultural memory that is detached from individuals and just floats through institutions or society. So the concept of cultural memory should be understood on two levels, the individual and the collective. First, cultural memory can be understood as the organic memory of the individual, which operates within the framework of a sociocultural environment (like in the story in the beginning of this chapter) and secondly, cultural memory as the *creation of shared versions of the past* (ibid., p. 15). Erll draws on Jeffrey Olick to clarify this: cultural memory thus can be seen as subjective categories in people's minds and both as patterns of public available symbols, objectified in society (Olick, 1999 in Erll, 2011). The latter also touches upon the interpretive approach of policy analysis that focuses on the concept of culture, and how organizations and policy convey meanings for different audiences through symbolic language.

This analytical distinction of the concept is interesting, because it reveals how cultural memory can be studied within different academic disciplines.

1. On the individual level, memory is socially and culturally formed. *'We remember with the aid of culturally specific schemata; we act according to culturally shared values and norms; we assimilate second-hand experiences into our personal wealth of experience'* (Erll, 2011, p. 97). Cultural memory studies on this level are connected with (organisational) psychology, anthropology and even neurosciences.
2. Looking at the cultural level, groups remembrance is influenced by *symbols, media, social institutions, and practices which are used to construct, maintain, and represent versions of a shared past*

(Erl, 2011, p.98). Cultural memory studies on this level are connected with history, sociology, literary and media studies



*Figure I Analytical distinctions in the concept of cultural memory*

### 2.2.5 Connection with policy analysis

My argument is that both levels of analysis are suitable for the field of public administration and organisational science and specifically policy analysis. Policy makers can be seen as a group with their own cultural memory. As a cultural group, policy makers have their own memories and assumptions when they are working on policy problems and solutions. These memories and assumptions influence the way policy makers perceive problems and solutions and to what extent different alternatives are perceived as successful policies. What worked or did not work in the past becomes guidance for the future. Within this group, these memories are shared and become more than just plain descriptions and reflections on practices in the past. The memories carry lessons for policy makers, especially for new policymakers who enter the group. Because they did not have first-hand experiences, these lessons become symbols for what it means to be a policy maker within a certain policy area. Although the historical ‘truth’ of a certain representation of the past may be contested, it serves the purpose of creating a shared understanding about what works and what it means to be part of the group of policy makers. The study of cultural memory among policy makers – both its content as well as its source - can help us to understand how these understandings are formed and how it influences the process of policy making, as well as the outcomes.

## 2.3 Links with existing policy analysis literature

In order to come up with core concepts for analysing policy processes from a cultural memory perspective explore the links with already existing streams of literature. In this chapter the link with historical analogies, discourse analysis and institutional theory will be addressed while using examples of existing research.

### 2.3.1 Cultural memory theory and historical analogies

A link that may be of interest is the role and use of *historical analogies* in policy making, in other words, governing by looking back. In this stream of literature the focus lies how memories are used to make sense of current events and to what extent it offers a template for future action. Although the literature on historical analogies focuses almost exclusively on crises situations, for example war (Angstrom 2011; Record 2007) insights regarding the use of analogies can also inform us about its role during ‘normal’ policy making. For instance the work of Brändström et al (2004), who presented an analysis of some ‘policy in crises’ cases in order to enhance our understanding of how historical analogies work, could also be applied to regular policy-making.

According to Brändström et al, an historical analogy is applied when *‘a person or group draws upon parts of their personal and/or cultural memories, and/or parts of ‘history’, to deal with current situations and problems’* (p. 193). This can happen spontaneously or intentionally. Furthermore, when a certain act of remembering occurred, policy-makers can use the memory *cognitively* for future actions (make sense of the situation, assess the stakes involved, predict chances of success of the various policy options) and/or *politically* (use the memory to convince certain actors, gain support etc.). In the end, the use of the analogy can have an enabling or constraining effect on action repertoires.

Another interesting point is to what extent these insights apply only to cases in which it is very clear that an analogy with history is made or whether this could also be the case with *all* policy processes in which this connection is more indirect or tacit. Brändström et al. argue that when people are in situations of uncertainty and confusion- like a crisis – they *‘will search their memories and their knowledge base for situations that can at least give a clue as what is going on’* (p. 191). In those kind of cases, reconstruction of the past in the present happens very explicitly or even deliberately. However, the following examples from other streams of literature indicate that implicit and tacit use of ‘governing by looking back’ is also present in policy-making situations that are not considered as crises and that daily remembrance or analogies influence policy in more subtle ways too.

### 2.3.2 Cultural memory theory and discourse analysis

An interesting example of the influence of cultural memory dynamics is given by O’Callaghan, who studied the influence of the ‘inflation narrative’ on the German position regarding European monetary policy (O’Callaghan, 2012). He concluded that the memory of The Great Inflation in Weimar Germany carries so much weight that it became the standard historical narrative for warning against inflation, despite the fact that some powerful images in the narrative are contested and may have never happened. However, truth or not, it influenced policy outcomes to a great extent. O’Callaghan draws on Bergson in order to show that in the German case there is *habit* memory and *pure* memory. He states that when external stimuli occur and we need to act on them - for instance a societal problem that requires policy decisions - we tend to revert to our habit memory. Habit memory provides answers that are already prepared. Although the external

stimulus could be different from a former one, the habit memory seeks the resemblance and acts on the already prepared repertoire. Pure memory, on the other hand, is more rich and pays attention to every detail, but '*needs imaginative effort; it requires us to 'detach ourselves from the action of the moment'*' (O'Callaghan, 2012 p, 656).

O'Callaghan's uses the concepts of *habit* and *pure memory* to show how memories are formed among individual policy makers and hence influence action. This study approaches cultural memory more on a psychological level and could be categorized in the Erl's first analytical distinction (see 2.4). A typical question that suits this analysis is 'do policy makers rely on habit memory in this specific case? And how does that work on the individual level?' Like the story at the beginning of this chapter, one could identify the 'walking companions' of the individual policy makers and how are (shared) experiences communicated and how does that influence the shared understanding of the policy case in question.

Although O'Callaghan's study starts at the individual level, we see continuous interaction with the collective level. The narrative of the Great Inflation shapes the perspective of the policy makers, which raises question about how knowledge systems and versions of the past are established among them. For instance, how did the memory of the Great Inflation become part of the policy community's shared past and why not another (opposing) memory? Did the memory of the Great Inflation always exert a strong influence on the cultural memory of this policy community or did that change over time? And if it changed, how and why?

### 2.3.3 Cultural memory and institutional theory

While O'Callaghan uses the insights of cultural memory theory as a tool for discourse analysis for an empirical study, Rothstein (2000) sees cultural memory as a key to solve a more theoretical puzzle by linking cultural memory theory to both rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism. In rational choice theory, institutions are conceptualized as '*collections of rules and incentives that establish the parameters for the behaviour of individuals*' (Guy Peters, p. 48) and hence serve as mechanisms for channelling and constraining individual behaviour. An individual is motivated by utility maximization and can rationally choose to be constrained by institutions (together with other individuals) when those institutional constraints contribute to achieving their goals. However, from game theory (which is linked to rational choice theory) we learn that this only works if every individual complies and nobody 'free-rides', which is explained in the well-known example of the prisoners' dilemma. Given the fact that one individual is never able to know if every other individual will comply, trust is needed for producing cultural rationality. In a more theoretical study, Rothstein (2000) is intrigued by the question how societies with low institutional trust can go on to become a society with high institutional trust, given the condition that formal institutional structures of both societies are the same (Rothstein compares Sweden and Russia). The main question that rises is '*How can the government (...) establish credibility and a reputation for trustworthiness so that actors (citizens, firms and organizations) believe that state officials will honor their commitments in the future?*' (Rothstein, p. 483). Rothstein argues that formal rules cannot solve this problem per se, because it can only function if people *believe* that the actors who are operating in these institutions are trustworthy. In other words, rational choice institutionalism fails to explain why societies with more or less the same institutional designs have different outcomes regarding the *compliance* towards institutional rules. As Rothstein argues: 'history of play' matters.



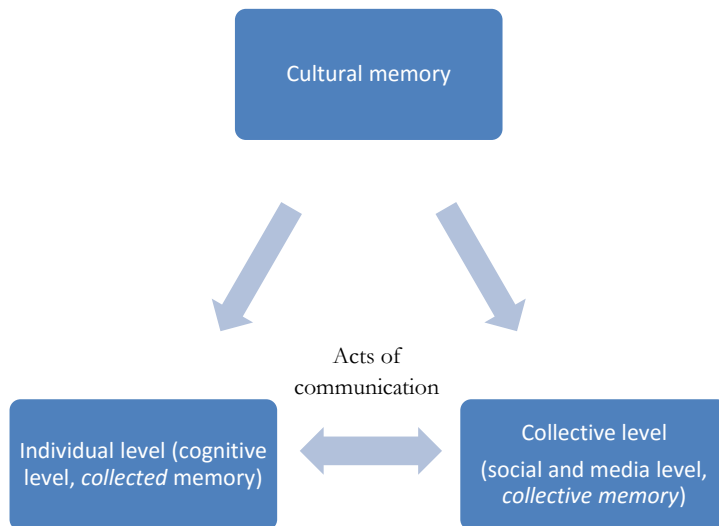
An important element in historical institutionalism is the influence of institutionalized ideas and hence path dependency, which simply means that *'the policy choices made when an institution is being formed, or when a policy is initiated, will have a continuing and largely determinate influence over the policy far into the future'* (Guy Peters, 2012, p. 70). Furthermore, Rothstein argues (building on game theory with the famous prisoner dilemma) that when it comes to trust the actions of the agents highly depends on what they think 'others would do'. The agent's 'right choice' will only pay off when others do the same. Thus, the agent will take the moral standards and history of 'the others' into account. Cultural memory theory can inform us about those historical constructions.

According to Rothstein, the question is where the agent's view of 'others' comes from and for this we need a theory of how 'others' are constructed. Which cognitive maps prevail in the choices relevant actors are making? Here, cultural memory theory can help us to explain why different cognitive maps regarding the concept of trust become dominant among large groups in society *over time*. Importance questions to ask to the respondents are 'Who are we? Who are the others? What can these others be expected to do if we choose to trust them?' Taking path-dependency in consideration, Rothstein makes a plea to *'follow the path backwards'*, firstly to give historical explanations why and how a certain institution successfully was established and secondly, how the feedback mechanism that follows after the establishment of a certain institution formed into a cultural memory, in this case the different cultures of trust of Sweden and Russia that became dominant over time. Rothstein's study gives insight in how we can study the way in which cultural memories are connected to history and how it works through in the present. Understanding previous practices – 'the history of play'- and understanding how people perceive and remember history can be an important element in explaining current policy practices. The approach suggested by Rothstein would apply mostly to Erll's second analytical distinction (paragraph 2.4).

In general, it seems that shared memories play an important role in how policy is formed. It is cultural memory theory that can provide answers on how this works. Cultural memory theory can give us insights if, and in which ways, and to what extent memory exerts powerful influence over the way policy communities define problems and identify potential solutions.

## 2.4 Studying cultural memory among policy-makers

The difficulty with using cultural memory as an approach for policy analysis is that the concept seems to be connected with so many aspects of life. Whether it are symbols, stories, traditions, ideas, identity, media or practices; all seem to be to some extent 'contaminated' with history, memory and/or individual experiences and remembrance. *'Critics point out that concepts of collective or cultural memory thus blur the fine gradations between all these phenomena'* (Erll, p. 99). Erll (2011) dismisses this critique by emphasizing advantages of having such a broad umbrella which helps us to see *'the (sometimes functional, sometimes analogical, sometimes metaphorical) relationships between phenomena which were formerly conceived of as distinct'* (ibid, p. 99). Indeed, considering Rothstein's example of the differences in compliance between similarly designed institutions in different countries, it could be the actor's cognitive maps, formed by the remembrance of the history of play, that explains those difference (which could not be explained by following the idea of rational calculus, derived from rational choice institutionalism). A broad umbrella concept thus seems to be required for using this approach.



The concept of cultural memory postulates the *individual level* (the collected memory) and the *collective level* (the versions of a shared past, knowledge systems of social groups). The latter shapes the former, the former is actualized in the latter. In her conceptualization of cultural memory, Erll argues that memory is a kind of switchboard which organizes experience both prospectively and retrospectively:

- *‘Prospectively: cultural memory is the source of schemata which already pre-form experience, that is, which decide what will even enter the individual’s consciousness and how this information will be further processed (...)’*
- *‘Retrospectively: through cultural remembering that we create experience as an interpretation of events that guides future action’ (ibid., p. 112)*

Those two elements of the concept of cultural memory are two sides of the same coin and therefore cannot be separated in research, because it *‘can only be understood through their interaction with each other’* (ibid., p. 101). Taking the research examples of the former chapter as an example: when O’Callaghan studies the use of *habit* and *pure memory* among policy-makers, the focus lies on the individual level, but it would only be worthwhile when he connects this with its actualization on the collective level. And Rothstein’s focus on the (cultural) construction of the *history of play* from ‘the others’ becomes more worthwhile if he could show how this actually shapes individual behaviour. Considering the field of public administration as an interdisciplinary field, the study of policy, policy processes and policy-makers should thus focus on both conceptual levels. However, when focusing on the individual and cultural level of the concept *‘it is important to be aware of the direction and degree of the transfer of meaning, the productivity of the trope for the specific research question, and also the chance that the logic of the figurative term could lead us astray’* (ibid, p. 101). On the one hand, the researcher needs to look with scrutiny to what extent the phenomena being studied is ‘suitable’ for a certain memory approach. On the other hand, when applying a cultural memory approach, the researcher should estimate the relative weight of cultural memory dynamics, as well as the ‘direction of meaning’, which points at the interplay between the individual and cultural level.



That being said, we need a conceptualization for doing empirical research regarding policy analysis. Because of the interdisciplinary character of public administration, one could imagine many possibilities. The strongest link however lies with institutional theory, specifically historical institutionalism. In assessing the influence of cultural memory on how policy-makers (but also other actors) perceive policy as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, the role of cultural memory dynamics in relation to *path-dependency* is a link of interest.

Rothstein (2000) already made an interesting case (see 3.3) regarding the influence of the ‘history of play’ on policy-makers, as well on other involved agents and stakeholders that are somehow involved or affected by those policies. He argues that there are many studies regarding the importance of ideas in politics, but few regarding why some ideas became dominant over others. The weakness of rational choice institutionalism is that *‘there seems to be the risk that when economist and rationalistic scholars in political science approach questions about norms, culture and ideas, they fall into a functionalist trap, taking these phenomena as just given’* (Rothberg, p 493). Cultural memory theory thus can be helpful in elucidating the dynamics that are behind the construction and reconstruction of ‘cognitive maps’ among policy makers. These cultural memories are not just there, but at some point in time created deliberately for strategical purposes (which also links to historical analogies), creating feedback mechanisms that reinforce certain behaviour along a historical path. These feedback mechanisms can relate to cultural memory that is *the underlying determinant of the establishment and evolution of institutions* (ibid. p 496). From an historical institutionalist perspective, the role of cultural memory should not be understood as something ‘just there’, given by nature or culture. Taking path-dependency into account, *‘we should look for the particular moments in history when political leaders actively and strategically sought to change the cultural memory’* (ibid p. 496). Tracing back the historical path of a specific policy field, questions related to the collective level would be: ‘How is the cultural memory constructed? Who are we and who are the others? At which moments in time is this cultural memory (deliberately) shaped or reconstructed by which actors?’ Questions on the individual level would be: ‘How are policy-makers and other involved actors informed by this cultural memory? How does it influence their perception of ‘who are we and who are the others’, their perception of good and bad policy and hence the influence on their actions?’ Depending on the (policy) case and the level of analysis, a researcher should decide which question applies the most.

## 2.5 Wrapping up

### 2.5.1 Summary theoretical framework

This theoretical framework is an attempt to connect policy analysis and cultural memory theory. In chapter 2.1 a brief overview is presented regarding how policy already has been studied from different perspectives. Developments in policy analysis approaches showed that through time models of policy analysis were adjusted to account for less rational behaviour within policy making. Starting with the prescriptive classic rational model, approaches towards policy analysis developed to theoretical models that have a more descriptive character. In order to account for less-rational behaviours, these new models included power dynamics, framing and subjective sense-making. I have outlined that the attention for the less rational dynamics is part of a broader development within academia, in which the Romantic reaction on the Enlightenment contained an appreciation of the subjective character of knowledge. Positivistic notions of history and

memory were contested and redefined from a more social-constructivist position. It is this development that made Halbwach's ideas on cultural memory up-to-date again.

Subsequently, the concept of cultural memory is introduced. Section 2.2 addresses how the concept can be applied on different levels in order to understand the role of cultural memory in relation to policy and how it can be used to study policy communities. Rather than understanding memory as something from the past, memory is constructed in the present, socially and culturally formed and therefore also cultural. Seeing the 'cultural' in cultural memory as an heuristic model makes the concept suitable for analysing it on different levels within multiple academic fields.

However, the concept has barely been connected to policy analysis. Section 2.3 explored possible links between cultural memory theory and already existing theoretical streams within the field policy analysis. In section 2.4 I addressed how the concept can be used for policy analysis on the individual and the cultural level, by looking at the role of cultural memory among individual policy makers as well as cultural versions of a shared past and how these can influence policy processes.

### 2.5.2 So what?

In order to make the circle complete again there is one important key question that remains that need to be answered in this chapter: so what? Why should we analyse policy making using cultural memory theory? What is the added value of this new approach in relation to already existing perspectives, for instance the rational perspective, the perspective of power or the interpretive approach? In this last section I will attempt to bring the previous chapters together by addressing these questions. Furthermore, cultural memory theory could add to historical institutionalism in explaining change. Core element of historical institutionalism is *path-dependency*, in which the formation of institutions to a great extent determines the path that is likely to be followed (Guy Peters, 2012). *There will be change and evolution, but the range of possibilities for that development will have been constrained by the formative period of the institution'* (ibid, p. 73). With those assumptions, historical institutionalism proved to be useful in explaining stability and the persistence of patterns, but makes it difficult to understand how changes can occur. To cope with this dilemma, historical institutionalism argued that change occur gradually over time, rather than radically. The process of gradual change could be connected with changing understandings of policy and changing cultural memories. Cultural memory theory can help us to elucidate the mechanisms behind these changing understandings of policy.

A cultural memory perspective on policy analysis is closely related to the social constructivist approach. What cultural memory theory brings new to the table is the inclusion of memory, remembering and its influence on policy processes, outcomes and action. Like Yanow (1996) and many others, policy has been studied intensively from an interpretive perspective, based on the idea that social reality is constructed, like cultural memory also presumes. The interpretive approach can give us understanding about sense-making, about why policy is never formulated neutrally and bears important symbolic meaning, which shapes our understanding of reality. What it does not give is understanding about how certain constructions of reality came to be over time and how memory dynamics affect these constructions. Cultural memory theory can give us insight in how the *remembrance* of past events shape policy, something that is not included in other (social-constructivist) models for policy analysis. However, the concept still has to be tested on

policy empirically in order to estimate its relative ‘weight’ for understanding policy processes compared to already existing policy analysis. Till now, literature gives a hunch that cultural memory adds value, but which is mainly evident on a theoretical level.

### 2.5.3 Towards an empirical analysis

In order to explore the added value on an empirical level, the second part of this thesis is focused on a case study in which the influencing role of cultural memory is investigated. As addressed in chapter 1, the case study focus on the Dutch water policy community and how they perceive and react on specific recommendations from an European think-tank, as well what their underlying considerations are. Finally, the extent to which these considerations are connected with cultural memory dynamics is investigated. In this final section of chapter 2 it will be addressed which specific empirical insights will be used for the case study.

When connected to the theory that is addressed in this chapter, this empirical case study applies mostly on the individual level of the concept of cultural memory, which is – as discussed above - the so-called collected memory that is constructed, communicated and hence reconstructed among individuals that operate within the framework of a social-cultural environment. In the empirical case that is central in the second part of the thesis this would be the individual policy makers that are part of the water management community in the Netherlands. Because the primary focus lies on the individual policy members being part of a policy community and secondly on their interaction with knowledge systems in which they operate, the analysis focuses mainly on how specific remembrance inform their behavior and hence policy processes.

In this case study, there are also connections with the collective level of the concept of cultural memory, which is – as discussed above - the versions of a shared past and the knowledge systems of social groups. In the empirical case, remembrance of the Polder model then should be understood as an element of importance in the shared version of the past among members of this policy community. However, the research question of this thesis does not address how a certain remembrance became part of the knowledge system of members of the policy community or during what events the memory got constructed and reconstructed. This is however an interesting angle for future research, something that will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

## 3. Methodological Chapter

### 3.1 Research Design

Research from a cultural memory perspective is connected with the social constructivist worldview. Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and hence develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2008). Cultural memories can be seen as subjective meanings that are negotiated socially and historically. These meanings are not definitive, but continuously constructed and reconstructed in the present. Another important element of social constructivism is the focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (ibid, 2008).

In studying policy processes from a cultural memory perspective, context is of utmost importance. In his plea that social sciences should quit trying to emulate the natural sciences, Flyvbjerg (2001) stresses the importance of context as an indispensable part of knowledge. *'The problem in the study of human activity is that every attempt at a context-free definition of action, that is, a definition based on abstract rules or laws, will not necessarily accord with the pragmatic way an action is defined by the actors in a concrete social situation'* (Flyvbjerg, p. 42). In order to achieve a really in-depth understanding of a social situation, a researcher must be deeply involved with the phenomena he wants to study. A single case-study gives the opportunity to get in-depth knowledge regarding the relevant contexts. Therefore, to study policy processes with a cultural memory approach, a single case study is a proper design in answering the research question.

According to both Baxter & Jack (2008) and Yin (2003) a case study design should be considered when:

1. the study is focused on understanding and tries to answer 'why' and 'how' questions
2. you cannot manipulate behavior of the participants (you can't answer your research question by placing the actors in an experiment)
3. the contextual conditions are indispensable for making sense of the case being studied
4. there are no clear boundaries between the context and the examined phenomenon

These conditions all seem to apply on the case at hand. The research question is concerned with understanding *how* cultural memory exerts influence on policy processes (1), and the policy community cannot be studied within an artificial environment (2), because the research question assumes that the content of water policies is deeply connected with history, memory, culture, tradition and the values that are held by members of the policy community (3). To what extent cultural memory dynamics exert influence on the policy community, along and in relationship with all other contextual elements is not clear (4) and for that very reason a single case study design is appropriate in order to answer the research question.

### 3.2 Methodology

The research question of this study is *'How does the remembrance of the polder model influence ideas about good water governance in the Netherlands?'* However, when it comes to conducting interviews as a research method, one cannot answer this question by asking members of the policy community directly about memories and how those memories influence their behavior. As chapter 2 shows, we remember with the aid of culturally specific schemata. These schemata are often taken for

granted and not something we are actively conscious about; it is tacit knowledge<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, ideas that policy makers hold are not exclusively informed by memory, but overlap with values, (cultural) norms, interests and dynamics of power. Thorough analysis should point out to what extent ideas are informed by memories, as well how these memories are connected and/or overlap with values and interests. Therefore, respondents should be asked about their ideas regarding the specific case at hand firstly, and only secondly the researcher should analyze if the data conveys information about present – but tacit - culturally specific schemata.

The assumption behind the research question of this study is that the polder model (see chapter 1) plays a role in informing ideas about good governance among policy makers. The recommendations in the OECD report seems to challenge some ideas that are perceived as the foundation of the Dutch institutional design and way of working, hence giving an opportunity to study the ideas and underlying assumptions of policy makers in the Dutch water policy community. Therefore, to shed light on those ideas and assumption and hence to what extent they are connected with cultural memory dynamics, the empirical part of this thesis should be about how the specific OECD recommendations are received within the policy community and on which grounds they are evaluated by members of the policy community. These kind of considerations are something which can be studied directly by making use of interviews, document analysis and/or observations, in order to indirectly distill out of that data if and to which extent these considerations are connected with cultural memory dynamics. Therefore, the *empirical* research (sub)questions read as follows :

1. *How did the Dutch water policy community perceive the OECD recommendations?*
2. *How did the Dutch water policy community react to the OECD recommendations and which ideas/interests influenced their considerations?*
3. *What were the underlying considerations?*
4. *What is the role of cultural memory in those considerations?*

Within the empirical research questions a distinction is made between perceptions, reactions and considerations. The idea of this distinction is to make the search for supposed present (but tacit) cultural memory dynamics more tangible.

First, perceptions inform us about the opinions that the policy community hold towards the OECD recommendations, e.g. to what extent the policy community recognizes and acknowledges the recommendations or disapproves and rejects them. Secondly, reactions however are about *action* and inform us about what the policy community actually did (or did not do) with the recommendations. It can also inform us about to what extent actions are in line with the ideas policy makers hold. Of course, there can be many reasons why members of the policy community do not act according to the ideas they hold. Subsequently, these reasons do not necessarily have to be connected with memory dynamics. Thirdly, to unravel underlying motivations behind the perceptions and reactions, information about the considerations is

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<sup>9</sup> *Values and so forth, since they are abstract, are difficult to know about or discover directly. They are hard to 'pin down', to make concrete and imaginable. In part, this is because values and meanings are often known tacitly, rather than explicitly. We typically do not speak to one another about our values and beliefs in everyday encounters in the post office or on the street (...) or if we do, we often present what we think we believe or value, or think we ought to value, or what we would like the other person to perceive as our value, yet these may not be the values we act out.* (Yanow, 1996, p. 11)

needed. Considerations inform us about the ‘why’ behind perceptions and reactions. Finally, the fourth empirical research question is about to what extent cultural memory plays a role within those considerations (alongside other possible factors that influence those considerations).

### **3.3 Interviews**

In order to answer the research question, this study relies heavily on interviews with members of the policy community. This section addresses how the sample was chosen, which method was used and in what manner the interviews were conducted in order to get reliable data.

#### **3.3.1 Sample**

Members of the water policy community were being interviewed. These members are part of different water institutions/organizations (central government, water boards) and have different functions within those organizations (such as administrator policy maker, advisor, lobbyist). The water institutions that will be included are the organizations that are united in Administrative Treaty Water (Bestuursakkoord Water), which are the following:

- Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (IenM)
- Union of Water Boards (UvW)
- Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG)

In order to get a comprehensive representation of the different organizations, multiple members of the water policy community were interviewed, active in different organizations that are concerned with water management. Subsequently, there is variance between the position of the different respondents, namely administrators, policy-makers, advisors and lobbyists.

Some of the organizations have solely water-related tasks, other operate in a broader field. All respondents however were concerned with water management.

As mentioned above, respondents cannot be directly asked about memories. Therefore, the main subject of the interview is the OECD report and the relation with the respondents’ ideas about good governance.

#### **3.3.2 Sampling method**

The used strategy for finding suitable respondents is the ‘snowball’ or networking method, which means that an initial number of participants is approached and are asked for the names of others, who are subsequently asked to participate in an interview (Boeijs, 2010). This method is suitable when the target group is difficult to reach, which is the case in the Dutch water policy community. Dutch water management is both big and fragmented. The first contacts for interviews were made during a network day for water administrators and policy makers.

To prevent talking only to ‘friends of friends’, contacts were also made via an acquaintance who is also working with members of the water policy community. By using the strategy of snowball sampling via different routes, the reliability of this study increases.

The interviews took place between April and June. The planning of new interview was stopped when there were no new topics mentioned during the interviews. This method is called saturation and is often used in qualitative research (Boeijs, 2010).

### 3.3.3 List of interviews held

Nine extensive interviews were conducted, with a duration varying from fifty minutes to one hour. All interview were transcribed verbatim. The distribution among included organizations is as follows:

- 5 interviews with employees of Union of Water Boards/Water Authorities
- 3 interviews with employees of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment
- 1 interview with an employee of Dutch Association of Municipalities

The function titles of the respondents were: lobbyist, politician, administrator, senior policy maker, strategic advisor and director. Due to reasons of anonymity, the function titles cannot be directly ascribed to the specific organizations.

### 3.3.4 Interview rules

When searching for the role of memories, it is tempting for the researcher to ask directly about memories or ask directive questions which steer the respondent towards answers that support the thesis that memory dynamics are of influence in the policy process. Therefore, some ground rules for the interviews were set in order to prevent bias as much as possible:

- The interviews will be semi-structured
- Topics are:
  - Background/function/tasks of the respondent within his/her organization
  - Respondents description of the occasion and impact of the report
  - Respondent views on 1) perception, 2) reaction and 3) considerations regarding the following OECD recommendations:
    - Recommendations regarding awareness gap
    - Recommendations regarding financial arrangements
    - Recommendations regarding independent oversight
  - Polder model
- Only when the respondent makes a references to the past, the interviewer can ask about how the respondent thinks those references play a role. This means that the interviewer cannot ask, for example, ‘Do you think that the idea of the polder model influences the outcome of the implementation of recommendation X?’ if the respondent did not mentioned it before.
- When all recommendations are addressed and the respondent did *not* make any references to the past, the respondent will be asked if they recognize the idea of the polder model. This is legitimate, because the OECD report describes this model as a model of influence regarding the current institutional design of Dutch water management.



### 3.3.5 Analysis of the interviews

The verbatim transcripts of the interviews will be thoroughly analyzed by categorizing relevant quotes within according to the following system:

Topic	Label Category A	Label category B
General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Function</li> <li>▪ Tasks</li> <li>▪ Occasion OECD report</li> <li>▪ General appreciation of the report</li> </ul>	-
OECD recommendations regarding awareness gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perception</li> <li>▪ Reaction</li> <li>▪ Considerations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reference to culture</li> <li>▪ Reference to Polder model</li> <li>▪ Reference to the past</li> </ul>
OECD recommendations regarding financial arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perception</li> <li>▪ Reaction</li> <li>▪ Considerations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reference to culture</li> <li>▪ Reference to Polder model</li> <li>▪ Reference to the past</li> </ul>
OECD recommendations regarding independent oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perception</li> <li>▪ Reaction</li> <li>▪ Considerations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reference to culture</li> <li>▪ Reference to Polder model</li> <li>▪ Reference to the past</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Documents

Policy documents from different institutions within the water management policy community that are published after the OECD publication are being studied. The type of documents can be formal documents (e.g, official policy plans, treaties), research reports, as well as informal documents (memo's, meeting reports). Within those documents there will be searched for references to the OECD report, specifically to the recommendations made in the OECD report. Furthermore, references to ideas about (good) governance, specifically references to the polder model, are being studied and to what extent those references are in line with or opposing the OECD recommendations. Within the analysis, the role of documents will be mainly supportive in relation to the input of the respondents.

### 3.5 Results & analysis

The outcome of the empirical part of this thesis will be presented in chapter 5. Because this thesis is an interpretive study and the researcher continuously interacts with the data , the results and the analysis are presented in one chapter. Within the chapter, a lot of interview fragments will be presented and analyzed. In order to guarantee anonymity of the respondents, the specific function of the respondent will not be mentioned. Instead, they will all be called 'policy maker no. X, from organization Y'. The reason for the function title policy maker is that all respondents are part of the policy community and directly or indirectly contribute to policy making.

### 3.6 Validity & Reliability

In qualitative research the meaning of the terms validity and reliability is used differently than in the more traditional positivistic research. The methods used in this research are flexible and not



standardized a priori. Standardization is hard, because the researcher is aiming for what is useful to answer the research question (Boeije, 2010). However, this does not mean that qualitative research cannot be valid or reliable (Yin, 2003). In this section it is outlined how validity and reliability is maintained in this thesis.

External validity is hard to reach, meaning that it is not possible to generalize the outcomes of the case study. The aim of the case study is to generalize on an analytical level, may it be a limited analytical generalization considering the explorative character of the case study. However, the analysis aims to elucidate dynamics of cultural memory based on rich data. Insights regarding these cultural dynamics can be applied to other contexts, although they may differ, because the object of inquiry is a policy community, which never behaves in a static way. To ensure reliability as much as possible, the methods being used are outlined clearly in this chapter. Furthermore, all interviews are recorded, transcribed verbatim and hence coded with software. By doing this, the analysis becomes more standardized and own preferences of the researcher are diminished.

## 4. Contextual Chapter: Dutch Water Management

The Netherlands is internationally well-known for its water management. The small and densely populated country lies partly below sea-level and is protected by dunes and dikes. Without those protections and without continuous care and maintenance of all the protection systems, more than half of the country would be regularly flooded and the safety of more than nine million citizens would be in danger (Borger & Ligtendag, 1998, Havekes et al, 2015, Brouwer, 2013). Considering that the most densely populated areas are situated in the areas that needs water protection the most, it is not strange that the Netherlands have invested a lot in water governance in order to use the reclaimed land for economical and agricultural purposes and to keep their feet dry till date. In this chapter, a concise history of water management in the Netherlands will be addressed. Subsequently, one section will be devoted to the current organization of Dutch water management.

### 4.1 Water management in the Netherlands: a concise history

It is without doubt that water played an important role in the development of the landscape and society of the Netherlands (Borger & Ligtendag, 1998). Indeed, already in 800 A.C. the Dutch started to reclaim land in order to exploit it for agricultural and economical purposes (Van de Ven, 2003). Historically, the control and management of water was organized on a local level. This already started in the middle ages, where ordinary people (and not their lords) took initiative for the construction of dikes (Borger & Ligtendag, 1998). It took a lot of effort to handle and organize these tasks for local administration, so in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the first water organizations were established, consisting of local stakeholders. In order to keep the reclaimed land dry and useful for agricultural purposes, water level management was needed, as well maintenance of the dikes and water trenches. Being a stakeholder, every farmer had to pitch in by doing maintenance work for the benefit of the local community and taxes had to be paid. Organization and taxation were carried out by a board, consisting of and chosen by locals. Taxes were imposed proportionally, based on the interest-pay-say principle (Neelen et al., 1999), meaning that someone with more land had to pay more, but also had a bigger interest and say. These organizations developed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present-day Water Boards, which makes it the first democratic institution in the Netherlands (Brouwer, 2013). Of course, the design and tasks of water boards changed over time, as well their embedding in the legal systems and its relation to other governmental institutions. *Reinforced by the broadening of the Water Boards' historical task of flood control with new tasks closely related to and integrated with land use planning, nature conservation and environmental protection (in other words, the transition toward all-in water authorities, small water boards merged into larger ones* (Brouwer, 2013, p. 74). These scale increases that regional water authorities have undergone has resulted in the remaining of 23 water boards from the approximately 2650 that existed in 1950 (Havekes et al, 2015).

History shows that the presence of water authorities was no unnecessary luxury. Dike construction along the sea, rivers and lakes was an ongoing process of success and defeat and often measurements were taken after major flooding crises. In the last century for example, after major floodings in North-Holland 1916, a 32 kilometre enclosure dam was build (the Afsluitdijk), transforming an inland sea into a lake. Furthermore, the Netherlands build 'the Delta Works' in the south-western part of the country after dike breach in 1953, due to a disastrous storm. When the project was finished in the sixties, these 'water victories' were celebrated as a manifestation of

Dutch national vitality, but also gave rise to protests which were bound with values of ecology and nature (Brouwer, 2013). The change in viewing water problems as mere technical problems towards a view in which ecological values too were considered also changed the way of working within water authorities. *The predominant focus of water boards – prior often labeled ‘farmer republics’ – on drainage to develop agricultural land, moved towards a more integral water management approach, whereby groundwater, surface water, and quantity and quality issues are viewed in their mutual interrelationships, and whereby ecological considerations are more and more appreciated* (Brouwer, 2013, p. 74). Till present day, almost every citizen in the Netherlands is to some extent affected by water, making the field of water management very complex, due to many stakeholders and interests. The following paragraph elaborates on the current structure of Dutch water management.

#### 4.2 Formal structure of water management in the Netherlands

Although not the only institution concerned with water management, the water boards have kept their special position in Dutch water management. Till present-day, regional water boards are functional, decentralized governmental institutions (Havekes et al, 2015) and operate in a highly complex and fragmented field. Decision making is embedded in a multi-level governance system, in which close collaboration take place between different governmental organizations, such as central government, regional and local government (provinces, municipalities and water boards) and last but not least stakeholders (farmers, businesses, residents). The position of the different governmental organizations that are concerned with water management can be depicted as follows:

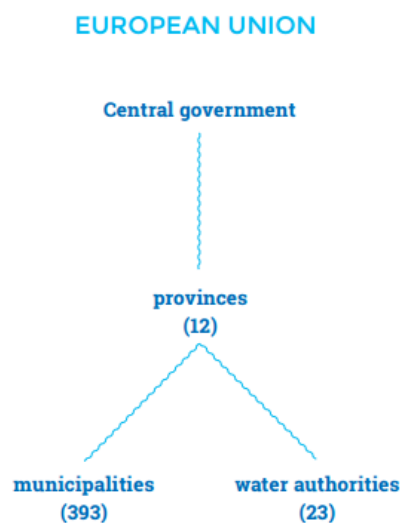


Figure 1: Hierarchical structure Dutch water management (Havekes et al., 2015)

As the above figure suggests, the regional water authorities are not the only governmental actor that is concerned with water management, although they are the only governmental actor that is concerned *only* with water-related tasks. In the Netherlands, water is managed locally when possible. When the task at hand is region-transcending, provinces and national government are responsible. For example, water authorities are responsible for flood protection in local areas, but the national government is responsible for flood protection regarding the total Dutch coast (coastline maintenance) and the management of the dams. The same goes for the task of managing water quantity (management of water shortages and surpluses) and water quality

(managing pollution, wastewater etc.) The state manages the bigger water systems (seas, big lakes and main rivers), while the water boards are responsible for the bodies of water that are of regional and local interest. Exact management boundaries, standards and legal instruments are indicated in the Water Regulation Act and Water Act (Havekes, 2015). Without going in-depth, a few more tasks are worth mentioning, namely the management of waterways (state and provinces), sewerage (municipalities) and the supply of drinking water (drinking water companies; these are semi-governmental organisations). Although formally separated, one can imagine – considering the literal fluidity of water – that intensive mutual co-operation between all involved parties is needed. For example, there is a strong relation between sewerage and the treatment of wastewater, while the former is the responsibility of municipalities and the latter of regional water authorities. Complexity increases even more, considering that drinking water is also part of the water chain.

In short, water management in the Netherlands is a highly complex and fragmented system of multi-level governance. Tasks are performed by different (semi) governmental institutions, including the state, provinces, municipalities, Water Boards, but also drinking water companies. Then there are a lot of non-governmental stakeholders (farmers, drinking companies, nature managers, residents) who wants to have a say in the decision making processes and are often organized, for example in lobby groups. Furthermore, modern integrated water management needs to deal with a greater number of interdependent relationships with other policy fields, such as spatial planning (Van Leusen and Lulofs, 2009). To make it even more complex, water managers nowadays have to deal the with implementation of European legislation. Within the field of Dutch water management, Water Boards have an unique position in the Dutch institutional landscape, having an independent position (also financially, because they can raise their own taxes). *‘The importance of staying dry and of having enough (pure) water is of existential importance for the Netherlands, so it is kept separate from the political context. The budget for water governance in the Netherlands is, therefore, not balanced against that of education, the health care system, defence and so on’* (Havekes et al., 2015).

### 4.3 Trends: towards water governance

Due to increased density of population and climate change, the management of water has become more complex and higher on the international agenda. The authoritative think-tank OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) already audited several countries<sup>10</sup> on their water management to assess where those countries can improve. Countries are assessed by making use of their Multi-level Governance Framework, paying attention to different layers that are connected with water governance, namely the content layer, the institutional layer and the relational layer (Water Governance Centre, 2016). In 2014, the Dutch government – in consultation with the Union of Dutch Water Authorities – asked the OECD to audit the functioning of their water management and their institutional and policy frameworks. The report was mainly laudatory, but there was also room for improvement (see also chapter 1.2). In the next section there will be elaborated further on the specific OECD’ recommendations. This will be done by paying specifically attention to the influencing role of memories, which is of course a central approach for this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/env/resources/water-publications.htm>

## 5. Results & Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, attention is paid to the influencing role of memories, specifically of memories of the Polder model, in order to answer the research question. First however, attention is paid to the Dutch political context in which the OECD audit took place. Because this topic came up very often during the interviews, it cannot be ignored. During the interviews it occurred that the occasion for inviting the OECD to audit Dutch water management was politically motivated. There was a political discussion going on in the Netherlands about the institutional design and the specific position of the Water Authorities (being a functional administrative body (see also 4.2). However, this is not mentioned in the report, but came up very often during the interviews. Therefore, attention is paid in the next section to how respondents viewed this political context. In this section, it will become clear that besides the political context, the content of the report is also very much appreciated by the respondents. Furthermore, in section 5.2 the independent position of the OECD will be addressed and how the cultural memory perspective is relevant to use in the case of the Dutch water policy community.

Subsequently, the three main OECD recommendations will be addressed by analyzing the perceptions, reactions and considerations of the respondents regarding each recommendation. Section 5.3 addresses the awareness gap, section 5.4 the financial arrangements and section 5.5 the recommendation regarding independent oversight. At the end of each section, the role of cultural memory dynamics will be addressed. It will become clear that the role of cultural memory dynamics will differ a lot between the considerations of the respondents regarding the different recommendations.

### 5.2 General appreciation of the OECD report: more than political power play

The OECD report in general is considered as a success in more than one way. First, the laudatory report seems to have ended the discussion about the abolishment of the water boards and removed that subject from the political agenda, at least for the time being. This is acknowledged by respondents within multiple organizations:

*Dus je zou kunnen zeggen, voor de Unie van Waterschappen is dit een perfect lobbyrapport, omdat de Unie natuurlijk voor zijn eigen bestaan vecht (...)*

*Het is best een stap geweest van het kabinet dat ze bij de start aan de ene kant hebben gezegd 'wij willen er van af'... en heeft nu de draai gemaakt van 'wij willen er niet vanaf, we blijven het zo doen' Dat is een hele belangrijke uitkomst geweest denk ik. Nou heeft de OESO natuurlijk niet letterlijk aanbevolen van 'u moet dat regeerakkoord wijzigen', maar natuurlijk die overkoepelende conclusie, of die constatering zou je kunnen zeggen, daar heeft het kabinet naar gehandeld.*

Policy-maker 1<sup>11</sup>, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

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<sup>11</sup> For guaranteeing the anonymity of the respondents, all the quotes are assigned to the function of *policy maker in Organization X*. As mentioned in the methodological chapter, not all respondents are officially carrying the title of policy maker, but all respondents are part of the policy community. Among the respondents are policy advisors, policy makers, (former)- administrators, (former) – lobbyists and politicians, which are spread across different water management organizations.

*Het is (...) hier in Nederland ook goed gepresenteerd en het heeft de nodige aandacht gehad. En je merkt wel dat in de politiek, in de Tweede Kamer, dat het daarna toch wel even wat rustiger werd, omdat je merkte van 'ja, daar kunnen we eigenlijk niet helemaal omheen' Want ja, iedereen wist wel dat er echt de nodige tijd en energie in was gestoken (...) en als de OESO dan met zo'n rapport komt en het is dan ook nog eens zo positief.*

Policy-maker 2, Water Authorities

It is an interesting fact that there is no mentioning of this political context in the report itself, while during the interviews respondents' descriptions of the political reality with its power dynamics was very present. Despite an absence of this contextual information, one can assume that the OECD probably knew about the water authorities' political agenda regarding their need for institutional legitimization and was therefore aware of the political context in which they had been asked to audit the Dutch water management. However, the report was definitely not perceived by members of the policy community as a lobby report only:

*Maar het [het rapport, WR]<sup>12</sup> is meer dan dat, het geeft natuurlijk ook heel veel inhoudelijke bespiegelingen waar we in de sector ons voordeel mee doen, dat is ook gewoon zo. En ik vind het ook wel mooi om te zien dat, redelijk objectief bekeken, er dus ook wel zo iets is van 'datgene dat we hier al jaren zitten te doen, dat is op zichzelf niet zo'n raar model'*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

In order to direct the analysis on reactions, perceptions and considerations regarding the recommendations of the report we will move away from the political context and lobby dynamics that surrounds the OECD report and instead focus on the content of the report and see if there is more to it than only the political struggles of the concerned actors within Dutch water management.

In general, all the respondents speak in an appreciative way about the content of the report. They are glad that the comprehensive OECD audit turned out very positively regarding Dutch Water management:

*En toen 18 maart 2014, ik zal het niet snel vergeten, ja toen ging bij ons de vlag uit. Overigens op het ministerie niet minder hoor. Ik ben bij de presentatie aan de minister geweest, dat deed dan Yves Leterme, oud-premier van België, was toen nog plaatsvervangend SG. Buitengewoon charmant en indrukwekkend deed hij dat toch, dat was knap. Maar die gaf Nederland ook zo een 8,5! Op een schaal van 10. En we worden aangehaald als 'global reference'*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

However, they talk in a constructive manner regarding the recommendations and points of improvement that are outlined in the report too.

*Kijk, Nederland krijgt in het rapport een hoog cijfer als het gaat om hoe het waterbeleid geregeld en ook de governance. En afgezien daarvan zegt de OESO wel van 'er zijn ook een aantal dingen die verbeterd kunnen*

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<sup>12</sup> Text between square brackets is added by the author for clarification, in this case an unclear reference of the respondent when the quote is cut out of the total interview.

*worden', met name als het gaat om meer triggers als het gaat om 'vervuiler betaalt', dat soort zaken. Dus ondanks het feit dat we een hoog cijfer hebben gekregen zie je toch dat we veel dingen aan het oppakken zijn. Wat er van overblijft is natuurlijk de vraag, maar er wordt in elk geval sinds eind 2014 – toen kwam het rapport volgens mij uit – behoorlijk hard gewerkt.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

This is important to notice, because that means that the report is not just a means for serving political interests only. If the report was only a tool used for the Water Boards' pursuit of institutional survival, a different analytical approach than the cultural memory perspective would be more appropriate regarding this analysis. However, as the respondents state, points of improvement are taken seriously in general, which is an indication that there is room for critical self-reflection and a focus on the content of policy too<sup>13</sup>. After the publication of the OECD report, multiple governmental organizations that are concerned with Dutch water management started working on further implementation of (most of) the recommendations. In what manner the recommendations are implemented (and also which recommendations are ignored) will be elaborated on further in the next paragraphs.

Another indication that the report is not only a lobby tool is the independence of the OECD itself. The OECD is not perceived as an actor who does the bidding of the Dutch government, but as a prestigious and independently operating research institute. The ministry and the Water Authorities were the clients that employed the OECD for the audit, but this did not stop the OECD to conduct the audit on their own terms:

*Ja, wij hebben voor die studie betaald. En dan denk je 'his master's voice, wie schrijft die blijft'...maar met die onafhankelijke peer-reviewers uit New York, uit London, Parijs, Zuid-Afrika, noem maar op..die club van de OESO laat zich zomaar de wet niet voorschrijven.*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

*En even vanuit zeg maar een objectievere gedachte: als je sec kijkt naar het wetenschappelijk gehalte en de kwaliteit van het rapport heb ik nooit iemand gehoord die zei van 'dat vind ik niet goed'*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The scientific quality of the content is considered high, which undoubtedly contributed to the impact of the report and hence the making and implementation of new policies. After publication in 2014, the impact and effect of the report is still tangible.

*Dus ik denk zelf dat het rapport...het heeft een hele grote impact gehad. Echt in positieve zin. Ik heb zelf nooit kunnen bevroeden dat er zo'n waarde aan toegekend werd en ook dat we zo positief op die aanbevelingen hebben gereageerd met echt ook een aantal zaken waar we nog jaren mee bezig zullen zijn...om die te verbeteren.*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

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<sup>13</sup> This will become even more clear in the next paragraphs, which address the specific recommendations and how the involved parties reacted on them.

In conclusion of this paragraph, the invitation by the Dutch government for the OECD to audit Dutch water management was primarily politically motivated. However, it seems clear that OECD's report is perceived as a work of high quality and therefore valuable when it comes to further policy development. Assessing the OECD's work irrespective of the political context, one of the respondents stated it simply:

*Ik vind het op zichzelf een prima rapport.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

How the specific recommendations were perceived, were reacted on and which underlying considerations were present will be addressed in the next sections.

### 5.3 Recommendation 1: the awareness gap

The first important recommendation that is covered in this study is the recommendation that concerns awareness gap, which is ascertained by the OECD. The OECD dedicates a distinct chapter on water risk awareness in the Netherlands (OECD, 2014). In the chapter a distinction is made between *risk* awareness (for example risk of floods, inadequate water quality and water shortage) and *instrumental* awareness (for example the citizens' awareness regarding existing policies and program that deal with water risks). In their analysis the OECD compares perceived water risks probability levels with the actual fact-based risks. Furthermore, attention is paid to the awareness among Dutch citizens related to water management functions, which actors are responsible for the implementation of water policies and how they get the job done. The OECD uses different studies from multiple organizations as information source in order to compare those aspects of awareness. Their overall conclusion is that the awareness of Dutch citizens is very low. *'There is a striking 'awareness gap' among Dutch citizens related to key water management functions, how they are performed and by whom. Similarly, the perception of water risks is low.'* (OECD report, p. 21) Specific risks that are mentioned in the report regarding what citizens then should be aware of are for example being aware of the basics about evacuation policy, the origin of the water they drink and whether their house is built on a flood plain.

The OECD notes that the awareness gap, *'whereby Dutch citizens take previous achievements for granted'* (ibid, p. 19) is mostly the result of a high level of trust in government and due to the fact that flood disasters are successfully avoided since the large flood of 1953. However, the challenge for the future is to keep citizens well-informed and alert, especially in light of climate change and hence increasing water risks. When the public is well-informed about water risks, government can influence their decisions regarding to what extent they expose themselves to those risks and thereby reduce the expected costs of damages in a flood event. Also, by decreasing the awareness gap, government can secure the willingness to pay for flood safety in the future. Thus, the OECD recommends the water management organizations to narrow the awareness gap in order to tackle those challenges by facilitating access to information on water costs, risks and performance and be transparent about it.

#### 5.3.1 Perceptions

The OECD finds it striking that the awareness regarding water safety risks among Dutch citizens is very low. In her reaction to the report, the Dutch minister of Infrastructure and Environment



acknowledges the existence of this gap and adds: ‘Door het succesvolle waterbeleid kan juist de politieke aandacht verminderen’ (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014). The recommendation is also endorsed by the respondents:

*Ja, waar wij het misschien ook wel met name over gaan hebben is natuurlijk onder andere dat punt van die awareness gap. En dat dan dat juist een buitenlander opvalt ligt wel een beetje voor de hand, want eigenlijk lijden we er allemaal een beetje aan.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The so-called awareness gap is recognized as an existing phenomenon. The fact that (non-Dutch) OECD researchers are struck by this is not a surprise for members of the water policy community. On the contrary, they confirm the existence of the awareness gap. However, the respondents also appreciate the wake-up call from the OECD:

*Dus misschien zien we zelf onze eigen kwaal niet. Maar dat dan de rest van de wereld tegen je zegt ‘job, je neemt het nu zo zoetjes aan wel helemaal een beetje voor granted’. Dat was eigenlijk heel nuttig.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The recommendation is also put in perspective by some of the respondents. On the one hand this relates to the notion of citizens being not always equally interested in these kinds of subjects and on the other hand the impossibility to be aware of everything at the same time.

*Aan de andere kant..ja, je kan de mensen niet zomaar met de nek erbij grijpen...als ze niet willen houdt het ook een keer op. Maar we zijn ons daar bewust van*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

*De waarneming [van de OECD, WK] is terecht. De vraag is alleen of je hetzelfde op een heleboel andere terreinen niet ook kunt zeggen. Ik denk het namelijk wel. We hebben het hier namelijk ook niet met elkaar over afval, tótdat het afvalstelsel wordt veranderd, dan is dat ineens het grote topic. Maar normaal gesproken vinden we het heel erg normaal dat we hop, de afvalbakken aan de straat kunnen zetten. En zijn we dan er heel bewust mee bezig van wat we precies doen? Nee, ook niet. Het is dus een veel dieper ding dan alleen van ‘mensen zijn niet bewust genoeg van water’. (...) Dus op zichzelf zeg ik niet ‘dat is een slechte aanbeveling’ alleen het is makkelijker opgeschreven dan gedaan. Ik begrijp heel goed dat de awareness van het water heel beperkt is.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

In general, the recommendation is perceived as justified and something of continuing concern for the water management community. However, there is also the reaction that the OECD is stating the obvious and that awareness gaps are always present when there is no immediate reason for concern or when things are just running smoothly.

### **5.3.2 Reactions**

The recommendation regarding the awareness gap is not only perceived as justified, but action was taken too. The minister of Infrastructure and Environment launched a national campaign with several components, which is also announced by the minister: ‘Met de partners van

*Bestuursakkoord Water wordt ook hard gewerkt aan een nieuwe aanpak voor publiekscommunicatie. Deze communicatieaanpak heeft tot doel het waterbewustzijn te vergroten, de noodzaak tot nieuwe maatregelen en ingrepen begrijpelijk te maken en om de betrokkenheid en het eigen handelingsperspectief van burgers te versterken.’* (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014). One of the components of this approach meant a different way of reporting with the purpose of being more accessible and interesting for citizens. This replaced the old way of reporting, which was literally a yearly report. One of the respondents described it as follows:

*Dat ging dan over de tarieven, de kwaliteit, van alles... Alle beleidsdoelstellingen worden even langsgelopen. Dat was altijd een tamelijk droog rapport, dat gaat naar de Kamer, de Kamer bespreekt het en klaar.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The old way of reporting is described as a little bit dull. In their new way of reporting not only the Tweede Kamer is informed. The yearly reporting moment is combined with addressing the citizens too:

*Er is nu voor gekozen om het een andere naam te geven, ‘Staat van ons Water’, en daarin wordt nog steeds gerapporteerd aan de Kamer maar er is ook besloten om daar een laag over heen te leggen (...) waarin we eigenlijk in veel eenvoudiger bewoordingen en met illustraties laten zien hoe het met het waterbeleid in Nederland gesteld is. Dat is echt bedoeld als communicatiemiddel, ook naar geïnteresseerde burgers – want ook niet iedereen vindt dat interessant natuurlijk – om op een hele toegankelijke manier duidelijk te maken van ‘hoe wordt in Nederland met water omgegaan’.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Part of this campaign was the launch of a website<sup>14</sup> where everyone can learn about aspects of water management, such as safety risks, but also the allocation of costs that comes with the execution of water policies. Another feature is a mobile phone app and/or a website where citizens can check if their house is under sea level<sup>15</sup> with the use of their postal code and what measurement they can take when flood risks occur:

*Nou goed, en dan zie je dat één van de eerste dingen die opgenomen zijn is natuurlijk die risk awareness, en dat er een website kwam en dat je je postcode kan intypen en dan weet je hoe hoog het water bij jou of bij mij gaat staan... in m’n huis bij wijze van spreken enzovoort, dus zo zijn er een aantal actiepunten uit gekomen.*

Policy-maker 4, Dutch Water Authorities

### 5.3.3 Considerations

The underlying considerations to take action regarding the awareness gap seems to apply to the general feeling that awareness among citizens regarding water management and its policies is desirable. In her reaction to the report, the Minister emphasized the importance of the support of Dutch citizens for future water management investments, which requires their awareness of the necessity of these investments (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014). During the interviews, the existence of the so-called awareness gap has never been denied and the OECD

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<sup>14</sup> [www.onswater.nl](http://www.onswater.nl)

<sup>15</sup> [www.overstroomik.nl](http://www.overstroomik.nl)

recommendation regarding the need for narrowing that gap has never been contested by the respondents. On the contrary:

*Ten aanzien van de awareness, heeft het ons allemaal nóg een keer getriggerd om daar zoveel mogelijk aan te doen .*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The awareness regarding water among Dutch citizens is considered a subject of common interest, which also does not clash with other interests. The recommendation seems to be pretty straightforward, which is a possible explanation why action was taken pretty quickly, also because the awareness already was a case of ongoing concern (considering the respondent that states that the recommendation ‘triggered us again to do something with it’).

However, some relativizing comments about the recommendation were made too, which already came up in the previous paragraph. This has to do with the feeling that it is easy to note lack of awareness and that citizens have to deal with so many streams of information at the same time.

*Alleen dat [awareness/betrokkenheid, WK] is een bijzonder taai probleem. Mensen worden tegenwoordig overgoten met informatie. Of het nou van je ziektekostenverzekering of van je telefoonprovider of noem maar op, je wordt helemaal dood gegooid met ‘kies vooral dit, kies vooral dat’ nou, daar moet je niet als waterbeheer nog eens tussen gaan zitten van ‘weet je hoe goed wij ons werk allemaal doen?!’ Dus dat moet je ook heel strategisch...ook dat is een traject van een hele lange adem om maar voortdurend toch in je communicatie proberen mensen daarin op te voeden en beter bewust te maken. En daar zijn ze ook allemaal mee bezig, zonder uitzondering. Het ministerie is ermee bezig, er zijn aparte clubs mee bezig, alle waterschappen zijn er mee bezig.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

Also according to some respondents, a strategic approach is needed to narrow the awareness gap, rather than just throw information randomly at citizens:

*Ik zoek altijd wel aanknopingspunten dat mensen ook geïnteresseerd raakten. Als je met zo’n rapport komt dan is echt helemaal niemand geïnteresseerd. Dus je moet gewoon dingen hebben die in mensen hun omgeving plaatsvinden en daar moet je de boodschap aankoppelen. (...)Maar niet zomaar, out of the blue. Daar geloof ik niet in.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

In this sense, increasing awareness is not a matter of content only. Form is as least as important, as well as timing. Citizens need to relate to the matter at some level, otherwise communication becomes a little bit meaningless, because nobody will be interested. However, to be successful in reaching citizens is difficult in reality.

A different and less mentioned consideration regarding the need for increasing the awareness relates to the need for accountability of the government, specifically about the way money is spent.

*Maar er zit ook een kant aan de transparantie die weer teruggaat richting awareness, van: kunnen wij verantwoording afleggen en laten zien wat we doen met ons geld? En daarvan hebben we gezegd ‘dat moeten we*

*doen', dat zou heel goed zijn om transparant te maken wat we allemaal aan het doen zijn, zodat die burger ook wordt meegenomen in dat verhaal.*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

#### **5.3.4 The role of cultural memory dynamics**

The underlying considerations seem to be partly linked to ideas about being accountable ('we want to show what we did with public money'), but also about being relevant and visible as a governmental organization. The latter can be understood in light of the political discussion regarding the institutional position of the Dutch Water Authorities (see also section 5.1). Furthermore, underlying considerations are linked with public value, namely the public servant's wish to keep the citizen informed and hence safe when it comes to water risks.

However, within the underlying considerations that respondents bring to the table regarding the OECD awareness recommendation, cultural memory dynamics seem to be absent. When asking the respondents about their considerations regarding their view on this specific recommendation, no references to the past are made in any manner, let alone that references to the past are staged as legitimization or support for the respondent's argument. If cultural memory dynamics would be present, than only so tacitly that it did not come up to the surface during interviews. The act of remembering thus seems not to be present within the considerations.

An interesting question is of course why cultural memory dynamics seems to be absent in case of this specific recommendation, but before that part of the analysis we will first address two other recommendations in which cultural memory dynamics seem indeed play a role.

#### **5.4 Recommendation 2: financial arrangements**

The OECD notes that the current financing system for Dutch water services has its strengths, for instance regarding the fact that the Dutch water government can raise its own taxes and therefore always has full-cost recovery for most of the water services and hence can manage to have a balanced budget by the end of the year. However, in order to ensure long-term financial sustainability the finance system needs to be shored up, according to OECD. Their main point can be reduced to this: *'those who pollute and those who benefit from water services should pay.'* (OECD report, p. 26). This may sound very obvious, but in reality the system is very complex, let alone the enterprise of changing it. This recommendation has to do with the principles one can use for establishing a finance system. These principles are connected with different ideas about what is the most just way for allocating the cost that comes with governmental water services. For example, when the solidarity principle is used, everyone pays equally for everything, whether someone contributes to pollution or benefits from water services or not.

Taking the Dutch water financing system into account, the OECD notes that the 'polluter pays' principle and the 'beneficiary pays' principle could be more fully applied. For instance, it is clear that the agricultural sector has a major share in the pollution of ground water, but that costs are borne by the whole society. This situation is causing that polluters have no economic incentive to reduce pollution. The same goes for the beneficiary principle. Government is making costs for providing clean groundwater, but some parties benefit more from it than others, so is it not just that they should pay more? Furthermore, in order to make a good estimation of which parties pollute and benefit the most, there should be a clear oversight regarding the allocation of costs

across various categories of society. According to the OECD, this has not been sufficiently assessed and more transparency regarding the allocations of costs is therefore needed in order to fully apply the polluter pays principle.

#### 5.4.1 Perceptions

In her reaction on the report, the Minister states that she agrees with the ‘polluter pays’ principle and that she wants to use it as the base for further steps. *‘Als algemene richting voor de discussie steun ik daarbij het principe dat degenen die profijt hebben of ingrepen doen die effect hebben op het waterbeheer (zoals bijvoorbeeld de landbouw en de industrie) ook de daarbij behorende kosten dragen (gebruiker/vervuiler betaalt principe)...* (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014). The general tone of the respondents is in line with the reaction of the Minister:

*Ja, een terechte en goede aanbeveling.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

*Dat is vervolgens ook bestuurlijk omarmd, goed om dat te doen. En dat zijn we nu ook aan het uitwerken, er wordt heel nadrukkelijk gezocht op een aantal onderdelen*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The OECD financing recommendation urges the Dutch water policy community to reflect on their finance system. In the interviews, members of the policy community indeed consider the implications of the remarks of the OECD:

*Je zou kunnen zeggen...de waterschappen, die halen altijd het geld wel op. Want die hebben kosten en die moeten betaald worden en uiteindelijk hebben zij een belastingstelsel wat dat omslaat over ingezetenen en dan een aantal belangencategorieën. Afhankelijk van hoe hoog die rekening is wordt dat geld verdeeld via allerlei wettelijke verdeelstelsels etcetera en politieke besluiten in dat waterschap. Maar de vraag is op gegeven moment ook wel een beetje van: ‘die verdeling tussen die categorieën, klopt die eigenlijk nog wel?’ Of zitten daar ook niet een paar rariteiten in?*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The importance of a stable and just financing system in the future is mentioned by the respondents. In the report, the justness of the allocation of pollution costs is debated and specifically to what extent the agricultural sector as a polluter should pay more. In order to reach this, critical reflection is needed, taking multiple factors into account.

*En toch zijn er een aantal zaken waarvan we nu zeggen van ‘is die verdeling nog steeds wel rechtvaardig?’. Is er geen aanleiding om dat iets te veranderen omdat bepaalde delen van onze samenleving iets teveel betalen ten opzichte van anderen. Bijvoorbeeld landbouw versus stad, dan betaalt de landbouw betrekkelijk weinig als je kijkt naar de verdeling en is dat geen aanleiding om daar kritisch naar te kijken?*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Agreeing with OECD recommendation is one thing, reflecting on what it actually means for policy is another. Respondents seem to take this seriously and are not afraid to take this bull by the horns:

*Je kunt natuurlijk meerdere beginselen hebben. Als je bijvoorbeeld iets onder solidariteit hangt dan wordt dat gewoon, simpel gezegd, over de burgers verdeeld. Daar zit helemaal geen prikkel of handelingsperspectief in. Net zoals bij inkomstenbelasting, jij kan niet zeggen van 'ik ga morgen meer gebruik maken van onderwijs, dus ik betaal wat meer aan onderwijs'. Maar je kunt ook een beginsel hebben wat meer aansluit bij de vervuiler of de gebruiker betaalt. Dan vergoed jij dus de kosten die je maakt door vervuiling. Dat kan een systeem zijn. De zuiveringsheffing is daar bijvoorbeeld van afgeleid, aangezien het waterschap die berekent in vervuilingseenheden. Maar die is net niet fijnmazig genoeg, dat is wel een voorbeeld van zo'n aanpak. Vervolgens kan je nog hebben van 'ik vind het belangrijk dat de baathebber of degene die iets geleverd krijgt betaalt', dus de kunst is om de mix van factoren te vinden, want het is natuurlijk niet de een of het ander. En daar zitten de waterschappen natuurlijk ook heel erg naar te kijken.*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The respondent mentions examples of factors one should take into account when reflecting on the water finance system. Agreeing with the 'polluter pays' principle forces policy makers to reflect on difficult questions as 'what is the pollution and who is the polluter, who is the one that benefits, should the polluter of the benefiter pay?'. Furthermore, 'what is the most just solution, is the most just solution also the most practical and what is the best balance between those factors?'. Thus, the recommendation is related to very complex matters and the answer is not clear-cut:

*En dat [aanbeveling van polluter pays principe, WK] is op zich ook een hele goede aanbeveling, zij het dat de uitvoering natuurlijk ingewikkelder is. We proberen natuurlijk in ons belastingstelsel er ook wel voor te zorgen dat degene die profijt of...dat die betaalt. Maar je kunt ook niet zo'n fijnmazig systeem bouwen dat er precies voor zorgt dat wat jij vervuult, dat je dat ook betaalt. De uitvoeringskosten voor zo'n regeling zijn 50 x zo hoog. Dus vereenvoudiging moet.*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

The water policy community seems to agree with the OECD recommendation, but immediately adds the complexity of arranging a finance system that is just and at the same time practical, meaning that the solution must not be more expensive than the problem. The specific implementation of a cost allocation principles is a complex question in which multiple factors need to be considered. That being said, the water policy community agrees with the 'polluter pays' principle as a good starting point for future steps:

*Ja, dat [de aanbeveling van de OESO over 'polluter pays', WK] vind ik wel een terechte. Maar als je uiteindelijk de uitkomsten niet acceptabel vindt, dan moet je het met elkaar erover hebben van wat je dan wel acceptabel vindt, maar het is een goed vertrekpunt.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

#### **5.4.2 Reactions**

The previous section outlined that despite the general agreement with the 'polluter pays' principle, the specific implementation is not very clear-cut. However, this had not lead to stagnation in the policy process. The Ministry did a follow-up study how and according to what principles Dutch water management is finances in order to investigate where the finance system



could be more aligned according to the ‘polluter pays’ principle (Kamerstuk 27625, 2014). This is also addressed by the respondents:

*Daar hebben we een studie naar laten verrichten Twijnstra & Gudde en Taam, onderzoeksbureaus, om eens een heel goeie foto te maken van de financiën van het waterbeheer op allerlei aspecten. Nou, dat rapport is vorig jaar uitgekomen en op basis daarvan zijn de partners, de koepels – IPO, VNG, Unie, de Vewin en de minister – tot de slotsom gekomen van ‘daar moeten we een aantal dingen wat nader onder de loep nemen om te kijken of daar ook het principe ‘vervuiler/gebruiker betaalt’ wat meer kunnen introduceren.*

Policy-maker 2, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

This report lead to further action, namely the formation of four task forces:

*Er zijn eigenlijk vier prioriteiten. Die komen niet direct uit het OESO rapport, maar uit het daaropvolgende rapport van Twijnstra & Gudde. Daarin werd onderzocht van ‘we willen eigenlijk nog preciezer weten van wat we uitgeven en wie die kosten moeten dragen’ om vervolgens de vraag te stellen van ‘aan welke knoppen moeten we dan vooral gaan draaien’ met betrekking tot toekomstige financiering. Nou, stedelijk waterbeheer, diffuse bronnen, de hele waterzuiverings- en watersysteembeffing zijn daaruit gekomen en als laatste grond- en oppervlakte water. Dat zijn eigenlijk de vier prioriteiten zijn gekomen en daar zijn ook vier werkgroepen voor gemaakt. Elke werkgroep wordt door een andere koepel getrokken. Als ministerie pakken we diffuse bronnen. Stedelijk waterbeheer wordt door de VNG getrokken. Oppervlakte- en grondwater door het IPO. Waterzuiverings- en watersysteembeffing door de Unie van Waterschappen.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The four taskforces are gathered around four priorities that are formulated based on the follow-up study. These priorities contain the areas in which possible improvements can be made regarding a more sustainable financing system, in which the ‘polluter pays’ principle is taken into account too. The areas are Urban Water Management, Diffuse Sources, Water Purification Taxes & Water System Taxes and Ground- and Surface Water. The taskforces are composed of members of the different Dutch water management organizations that are united in the National Administrative Agreement on Water, but each taskforce is led by one of the administrative partners.

Without going into too much detail about what every taskforce is doing precisely, it seems safe to assume that the Dutch water policy community takes the OECD recommendation regarding the finance system very seriously, is very open for critical reflection and hence serious action was taken to investigate the options for policy change. In the next section, the underlying considerations for that action is addressed.

### 5.4.3 Considerations

At this point it is clear that the Dutch water policy community seems to agree with the financial recommendations and took action too. An important element in the reactions of the respondent is to what extent the application of a polluter/beneficiary pays principle is feasible:

*Nou ja..ik zou zeggen..het idee van economische prikkels is goed tot het niveau dat het uitvoerbaar blijft. Dus niet solidair, maar uitvoerbaar...in kosten van uitvoering.*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

An important consideration regarding to what extent members of the policy community agree with the OECD recommendation is to what limit policy adjustment can be realized without adding too much complexity and additional costs. However, under the condition that full implementation of the polluter pays principle is possible, this principle seems to be preferable above others and therefore an important consideration regarding the agreement with the OECD recommendation.

*Maar de kern moet denk ik toch zijn bij dit soort doelbeffingen, of doelbelastingen, dat er een hele duidelijke relatie is tussen waar je voor betaalt en wat je terugkrijgt.*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

However, the relation between what a party should pay and what the party gets for that money is not always clear, for instance regarding the previously mentioned polluting agricultural sector:

*En dan kun je echt wel op een andere manier bedenken hoe je ervoor zorgt dat je je landbouw niet om zeep helpt. Misschien moet je ze wel apart gaan subsidiëren. Maar dan wordt wél helder wat iets kost en weet je ook veel beter aan welke knoppen je moet draaien (...) Maar zolang dat één grote black box is en niet helder is wie nou voor welke kosten opdraait, wordt je ook niet gestimuleerd om zuinig met water om te gaan, en wordt je ook niet gestimuleerd om ervoor te zorgen dat er niet teveel verkeerde stoffen in het water komen enzø. Dus ik denk dat als je dat volstrekt transparant zou maken – daar gaat die aanbeveling natuurlijk over - ja dat je dan uiteindelijk veel meer knoppen hebt waar je aan kunt draaien om te voorkomen dat het de verkeerde kant op gaat. En daarmee kun je zaken ook verbeteren.*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

The application of the polluter pays principle is only possible when the condition of transparency is met. The former respondent mentions ‘killing the agricultural sector’, which is an indication that there is an interest of the agricultural sector to not be transparent about their share of pollution so they can avoid the costs. However, the respondent stresses that there are other ways to protect the agricultural sector and that if the policy community really wants to do something about pollution, absolute transparency is necessary in order to know where to intervene and hence build in the desired economic incentives for reducing water pollution. The recommendation to implement the ‘polluter pays’ principle seems to be linked with the wish for more transparency in order to reduce pollution rates.

The respondents were also asked if the ‘polluter pays’ principle did not conflict with the sphere of co-operation and ‘togetherness’ that is part of the Polder-model (which is also mentioned in the OECD report), especially because the polluter pays principle is the opposite of the solidarity principle, in which all costs are borne by the whole population (see also chapter 1.3 about the Polder-model). A respondent says the following about it:



*Nee, ik denk dat dat anders niet zou werken. Je bent toch niet van plan om voortdurend voor iemand anders de rommel op te ruimen. Ik zie daar ook geen tegenstelling in. Dus dat je samen het beleid maakt, daar is zo'n eh ..poldermodel zeg ik dan maar.. dat ligt voor de hand. En dat werkt dus ook heel goed.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The respondent applies the Polder-model on the *process* of making policy together, but does not apply the Polder-model on the *content* of the policy. However, the solidarity- and polluter pays principles are not part of the process, but of the content of policy. On the contrary, the respondent adds that the solidarity principle would even undermine the Polder-model:

*Nou, eerder integendeel. Ik denk juist, zo'n poldermodel zou pas goed werken als je merkt dat iedereen zijn verantwoordelijkheid néemt. En dat iedereen datgene dat die moet doen, ook doet. En zodra je merkt van ' ik doe dit allemaal, maar dáár lopen ze allemaal de kantjes ervan af', dan is je overleg ook gefrustreerd. Dan is de samenwerking ook niet meer goed. Dan haken mensen af.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

Interestingly, in this case the solidarity principle does not lead to solidarity, and the opposite of the solidarity principle *does* leads to solidarity, at least according to this respondent:

*Sterker nog, ik denk dat solidariteit alleen vol te houden is als je merkt dat iedereen ook zijn deel doet. Kijk, als jij en ik samen afspraken maken en wij zijn samen solidair en wij gaan samen iets doen en wij moeten daar allebei een deel in doen..en nadat ik halverwege ben kom ik tot de ontdekking dat ik mijn deel wel gedaan heb, maar jij niet, dan denk ik dat het met ons polderen en onze solidariteit snel gedaan is. En dat zie je ook in dat soort heffingen. Dus als mensen het gevoel krijgen van 'ja, ik betaal wel, maar hij niet' of 'ik word aangepakt en hem laten ze maar gaan', ja dan gaat het...Dus eerlijkheid en elkaar zo eerlijk mogelijk behandelen is niet in tegenspraak, maar juist een voorwaarde om dat poldermodel in stand te houden.*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

The respondent outlines a situation in which an actor is aware that another actor is polluting the environment, but that the costs of that specific pollution are not directly allocated to the polluter. Confronted with that situation, actors would then be less willing or even refuse to pay. It seems that when it comes to *water pollution*, the solidarity principle has little to do with actual solidarity. This is different when it comes to the costs to ensure *water safety*. Here, the solidarity principle is applied and does lead to solidarity, according to respondents:

*En daar zit natuurlijk ook het solidariteitsprincipe in, want wat we hebben is natuurlijk het Rijnlandse model qua economie. Met andere woorden, wat in het hele land natuurlijk geldt dat je zegt van als er geïnvesteerd moet worden in dijkversterkingen dat je zegt van 'nou in Limburg, wat hebben ze daar nou aan, want daar zitten ze goed' maar ja, als het hier in de Randstad onderloopt, heb je in Limburg ook een probleem. Dat wordt wel zo beleefd. Terwijl in Engeland hebben ze zoiets van: 'ja, goh, dat jij in de Randstad gaat wonen..dan moet je maar in Limburg gaan wonen, dan heb je geen probleem' Dat is het Angelsaksische model*

Policy-maker 4, Dutch Water Authorities

The consideration goes in a whole different direction when it comes to water safety. Even if people in the higher geographical areas are not directly influenced by water risks, they should pay equally in comparison with citizens who live in risk areas. This situation is compared with England, where it is considered as someone's own responsibility when he decides to live in an area with higher flood risks.

#### **5.4.4 The role of cultural memory dynamics**

The only role of cultural memory dynamics regarding the considerations of the members of the Dutch water policy community seems to be linked to the Polder model. However, this only comes up when the respondents are deliberately confronted with the assumed link between the Polder model and the so-called solidarity principle within the Dutch water finance system. Even then most respondents do not tap into cultural memory to make sense of the present.

When relating the polluter pays- and the solidarity principle to the Polder model, it is interesting to note that the polluter-pays principle is not conflicting with the Polder-model or the respondents idea about solidarity, nor that this principle deviates from how it has been done in the past. On the contrary, allocating costs to the source of pollution seems to be a prerequisite to maintain the Polder model. Although the solidarity principle is the opposite of the polluter pays principle, the therefore assumed contradiction between polluter pays principle and *solidarity* seems not present and just a matter of semantics.

Taking into account the cultural memory perspective and looking to the question how respondents perceive 'who are we and who are the others?', it seems that a policy in which the polluter pays principle is adopted is in line with the construction of 'who are we?'. 'We' in that sense is a policy community that acts according the ways of the Polder model. A more fully application of the polluter pays principle seems not to be in conflict with the Polder model or even prerequisite for maintaining the Polder model. A more fully application is only limited in terms of feasibility.

That being said, it is interesting to look to what extent the water policy community identifies itself as a community that acts according a so called Polder model. The relation between the Polder model and the perception of 'who are we and who are the others' by members the water policy community will become even more clear in the next section.

### **5.5 Recommendation 3: Independent oversight**

The final important OECD recommendation that is addressed in this thesis is about independent oversight. The recommendations regarding the awareness gap and the financial arrangements are linked with policies that exist *within* the Dutch water management system and its institutional design. However, this third recommendation that is central in this thesis is linked with the Dutch institutional system itself. '*Another striking fact of the Dutch regulatory model is the absolute lack of a third-party institution or independent mechanism for monitoring overall performance and compliance*' (OECD report, 2014, p. 257). Although de OECD is aware that the Dutch water governance relies on a system of many checks & balances between all the different involved parties, OECD still believeS that Dutch water management benefits from an independent party '*at an arm's length from water institutions*' (ibid. p. 257) that oversees all of them and measures their performances. The OECD line of reasoning is that with such an independent party, accountability mechanisms are

strengthened, which contributes to more transparent information among and between stakeholders. Subsequently, this will give more incentives for authorities to perform cost efficiently.

### 5.5.1 Perceptions

While the recommendations regarding the awareness gap and the financial arrangements did not lead to frictions, the opposite seems to be the case regarding the recommendation that stresses the importance of independent oversight. It is striking how the policy community feels unanimously misunderstood:

*Dat was een aanbeveling die wij niet heel erg goed konden plaatsen.*

Policy-maker 2, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

*Nou, wij waren daar op tegen dat dat zou gebeuren*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

*Nou, daar is de minister redelijk kritisch op geweest. De OESO zegt 'ze missen een onafhankelijke toezichthouder', als ministerie waren we het daar ook niet heel erg mee eens.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Respondents do not understand why this recommendation is included in the report. They do not agree with the OECD observation that the Dutch governance would need independent oversight. In her reaction to the report, the minister seems to tactically avoid the recommendation by not wasting too many words on it and only highlighting the positive considerations of the OECD: *"Het kabinet onderschrijft de conclusie van de OESO dat de organisatiestructuur in het waterbeheer goed functioneert. Het kabinet ziet dan ook geen reden om bestuurlijke of organisatorische veranderingen in het water voor te stellen"* (Ministerie of Infrastructure and Environment, 2014). The main source of the general objection against independence oversight seems to be connected with the idea that adding another institute that oversees and monitors is redundant and therefore unnecessary:

*Maar ik zie niet helemaal in wat nu de toegevoegde waarde zou zijn in de Nederlandse omstandigheden in de Nederlandse structuur en in de Nederlandse cultuur als je daar nu nog weer een onafhankelijk instituut aan toevoegt wat daar nou weer iets van moet gaan vinden*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

Also, this respondent mentions Dutch structure and culture as something that not fits with this recommendation. This is an interesting indication regarding the underlying considerations, something that will be addressed in the next sections.

### 5.5.2 Reactions

This section will be short, because the Dutch water policy community did not take action regarding the recommendation of independent oversight.

*Wat ook gebeurt, en die pak ik er eerst even bij, OESO heeft ook iets gezegd over die transparantie. Dat ging ook voor een deel ook de verantwoording van 'hoe wordt met het geld omgegaan?' Voor een deel ook – zij hebben die sector natuurlijk heel breed bekeken, dat geld zit bij allerlei verschillende partijen, bij waterschappen, drinkwaterverenigingen enzovoort – en moet daar niet een toezichthouder op? Nou daarvan hebben we gezegd 'dat doen we niet' want, eigenlijk is het toezicht op die watersector gewoon in het democratisch proces geborgd.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Oversight is something that already sufficiently is organized, so the only action that the policy community took is stating that the recommendation does not have added value.

*Die checks and balances die vonden wij meer dan voldoende hier in Nederland, dus wij vonden het niet een aanbeveling waarvan we dachten 'daar komt meerwaarde uit'.*

Policy-maker 2, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

*Dus wij hebben diezelfde dag zo'n soort verklaring uitgebracht: 'Wij zijn het eigenlijk helemaal eens met dat rapport, we zijn er ook blij om, we onderschrijven de positieve strekking, maar er is één element – dat independent oversight, dat onafhankelijk toezicht – daar zitten we anders in.*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

The Dutch water policy community agrees to disagree with the OECD recommendation, stating that from their viewpoint, independent oversight does not add value to the current arrangements in which checks and balances are institutionalized. Adding another institute only creates 'administrative fuss':

*Nou, niet nog een orgaan naast alles wat we hebben te zetten. Dat is dan echt bestuurlijke drukte creëren. En van toezicht, daar worden de watertaken niet perse beter van. We kunnen ons beter richten op 'hoe kunnen we het waterbeheer beter maken' en als er al falend toezicht zou zijn, dan kun je ook kijken naar de bestaande instituties. Wat zou die [nieuwe institutie, WK] namelijk beter kunnen doen dan wat we nu al doen?*

Policy-maker 2, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

### **5.5.3 Considerations**

One of the main underlying consideration for opposing to an institution that independently oversees all other water management institutions is that the current system already sufficiently provides the oversight that is needed for a well-functioning governance system:

*Dan gaan we véér wat optuigen. Het is niet zo dat wij één grote eenheid zijn hè. Doordat het georganiseerd is zoals het georganiseerd is, is het al een heel systeem met checks and balances. Want je hebt een provincie, je hebt een Rijk, en je hebt een VNG, drinkwaterbedrijven en de Unie van Waterschappen... wij volgen heel scherp of we het wel eens zijn met wat het Rijk doet. Dus er zit al een heel systeem van checks and balances in. Het ministerie van I&M heeft bijvoorbeeld ook nog het OIM, overlegorgaan infrastructuur en milieu. Ook daar zijn allemaal externe clubjes die ook een belang hebben*

*en inbreng kunnen leveren. We hebben dus al een zwaar georganiseerd systeem. De Kamer controleert dat ook nog. En om er dan nog weer een orgaan op te gooien... ja, dan denk ik ook echt van 'ja jongens, welk probleem zijn we aan het oplossen?'*

Policy-maker 1, Association of Dutch Municipalities

The respondent above mentions multiple organizations that keep an eye on each other. Firstly, the main partners that are concerned with water management (which also are united in the National Administrative Agreement on Water) and subsequently a Chamber that has a controlling function. Another respondent mentions this too and emphasizes again that implementation of this recommendation would be a very bad plan:

*En we hebben al een heleboel toezicht in Nederland! We hebben het horizontale toezicht van het eigen bestuur, de waterschappen benchmarken onderling elke zoveel jaar – dat staat allemaal keurig op onze site, het waterschapspoil en waterschapspiegel - we hebben de provincies en Rijk die elk besluit en het feitelijk handelen van waterschappen kunnen vernietigen. We hebben Europa dat ook nog een beetje meekijkt, we hebben de Nationale Ombudsman, met alle besluiten van de waterschappen daar kan je mee naar de administratieve rechter en de Raad van de State. Wij hebben dus toezicht genoeg! Wij vinden die roep om independent oversight eerlijk gezegd helemaal geen goed plan. Dat willen we gewoon niet.*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

Considering this collective disagreement (which is almost collective outrage it seems), one could wonder why the OECD would come up with such a recommendation. Did they not know how the Dutch system is organized? This is certainly not the case. On the contrary, the OECD report specifically mentions the Dutch system of checks and balances and acknowledges the benefits of it. Thus, the OECD is aware of how oversight is organized in the Netherlands and still makes a plea for another form of oversight, probably believing that it adds value. During the interviews, respondents reacted on that too:

*En met name dat verhaal over die versterking en uitbreiding van onafhankelijk toezicht... dat heeft er een beetje mee te maken dat een paar van die peer-reviewers, de Engelsman en de Fransman, erg uit een soort Angel-Saksische achtergrond dachten. Daar is dat heel gewoon. Bij OFWAT, de toezichthouder in Engeland, werken op waterbeheer ongeveer 5 a 6 duizend mensen. Nou, bij de waterschappen werken er in totaal niet meer dan 10000. Dus daar zit allemaal toezicht, terwijl er geen cent te investeren is in het waterbeheer*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

The underlying consideration just went a level deeper here. The recommendation is perceived not only as redundant in the sense that oversight already is organized sufficiently and that the OECD failed to see that, but the recommendation is also described as typically non-Dutch. The respondent describes the recommendation as originating from an Anglo-Saxon background. The supervisor of the English water management with its many employees (compared to the complete water sector in the Netherlands) is staged as an example of how common the activity of 'supervising' in the UK is. Furthermore, the respondent states that the Anglo-Saxon system is linked to a situation with little financial capacity for investments in water management, because in

the Anglo-Saxon system the money has to be spent on supervising. The comparison with foreign ideas on supervision is made by multiple respondents from different organizations:

*Het zijn natuurlijk allemaal buitenlanders met andere referenties die zoiets [rapport] maken. Wij vonden dat de samenstelling van bestuurlijke organisaties en toezicht goed geregeld is. En we zagen niet zoveel meerwaarde om daar weer een toezichtspartij buiten te zetten om het hele waterbeheer nog eens van toezicht te voorzien.*

Policy-maker 2, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

So far, the rejection of the recommendation regarding independent oversight and the underlying consideration regarding 'Anglo-Saxon ideas about supervision which not fits in the Netherlands' seems to be neutral, in the sense that respondents do not blame the writers in failing to understand how the Dutch system works. However, the rejection gets even more intense when the recommendation is understood as a failing to appreciate the Dutch water governance system:

*Ik denk dat... de onderzoekers van zo'n rapport... ik vind het rapport wel een beetje biased in de zin dat ze veel vertrouwen lijken te hebben in marktwerking. In de zin van 'vervuiler betaalt', maar ook 'streng toezicht' op die markt. Je ziet bijvoorbeeld in Engeland, dat is heel sterk geprivatiseerd, daar hebben ze ook een toezichthouder die dat goed in de gaten houdt.*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

A distinction is made between the Dutch 'public' water management system and the English 'private' water management system, in which the public system is appreciated above the private system. This is addressed by multiple respondents from different organizations:

*Ja, wat ik vind dat bij een privaat stelsel... Je geeft zo'n private organisatie waarvan de aandelen op de beurs verhandeld worden en mensen zijn verplicht te betalen.. ja dan mag je daar wel stevig toezicht op zetten! Alleen, ja, zo'n systeem is krakkemikkiger in mijn beleving dan ons eigen publieke systeem! En dat bewijst dat rapport eigenlijk en ander bewijst de ervaring het wel.*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

*En in Nederland is het waterbeheer heel erg publiek georganiseerd. En die publieke organisatie, dat zijn dus overheden en dan is het ook toeval..bijzonder dat het een speciale wateroverheid is. En die hebben eigen taken op dat waterbeheer, met eigen bevoegdheden. En eigen controlesystemen*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

Why is the public character so much appreciated in comparison with a more private system? One consideration is the appreciation of the perceived absence of hierarchy in the Dutch system.

*Dat is dan een beetje de Nederlandse staatsinrichting, maar daar geldt het adagium 'er is geen hiërarchie'. Niet van bestuursorganen. Er is wel een hiërarchie van regels. Europese regels gaan boven nationale regels; nationale regels gaan natuurlijk boven de waterschapsregels. Maar het is niet zo dat per definitie de rijkssoevereïteit boven ons, boven de waterschappen is gesteld*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

Thus, independent oversight is linked with a private system, which is linked with hierarchy. Then again, why is absence of hierarchy appreciated?

*En ik heb het idee dat een beetje miskend [in de aanbeveling, WK] wordt hoe wij in Nederland met elkaar het waterbeleid in elkaar fietsen, namelijk, er is heel erg corporatisme hè, dus heel erg in samenwerking, met akkoorden, bijvoorbeeld bestuursakkoord Water. En dit [de aanbeveling, WK] druist juist een beetje in tegen dat soort akkoorden, waarbij je juist vanuit gezamenlijkheid, vanuit vertrouwen, vanuit de hele poldergedachte zal ik maar zeggen met elkaar in overleg bent*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Together, trust, cooperation with covenants are appreciated, while it is believed that the recommendation on independent oversight contradicts all what is appreciated. These elements are also linked to the 'Polderthought' (poldergedachte), the tradition of consulting (contrary to commanding) and thus a specific administrative culture:

*En dan denk ik dat Nederland bij uitstek een land is waar die openheid en die onafhankelijkheid van de pers en het democratisch gehalte van alle democratisch gekozen besturen gewoon heel ver ontwikkeld is en over het algemeen ook heel integer is. En dat maakt natuurlijk wel verschil. Als jij in een andere cultuur komt waar dat allemaal maar..een slagje dubieuzer ligt.. – en daar hoef je elke dag maar de krant over open te slaan – of nu weer, wat er allemaal weer in Panama [Respondent verwijst naar Panama Papers] is gelopen en noem maar op – als je in zo'n cultuur zit zou je ook eerder de behoefte hebben om te zeggen: 'maar daar moet nog door een onafhankelijke autoriteit eens een keer naar gekeken worden'*

Policy-maker 2, Dutch Water Authorities

This respondent describes the high levels of trust within the Dutch system as an indication of a high level of development. Independent oversight is linked to a culture of mistrust or even contexts in which corruption is present (the respondent mentions the scandal of the Panama Papers). In that sense, this OECD recommendation is perceived as a lack of trust, at least by some members of the policy community. This seems to sting, because the members of the policy community are proud of the way they fix their water management by making use of 'soft' covenants that work by the grace of mutual trust (instead of 'hard' and hierarchical rules).

*Dat is hetzelfde met de implementatie van wetgeving in Brussel. Toen zijn wij dus convenanten gaan sluiten, bijvoorbeeld met de chemische industrie van 'binnen tien jaar moet u die doelen halen' en dat is echt weer een Nederlandse manier. Dus niet van 'we voeren een wet in en die gaat over 2 jaar in en dan heeft u dus nog 2 jaar overgangstermijn en daarna is het keihard' nee, we hebben gezegd je moet dat flexibel doen want dat bedrijf moet herinvesteren in z'n productiemiddelen, nou, dat moet je eerst afschrijven, want als ik vandaag moet investeren dan heb ik een verlies, dat is slecht voor bedrijf, slecht voor de werkgelegenheid, dus daar moet flexibiliteit inzitten. Maar wél stip op de horizon en wél druk dat het gaat gebeuren. En ook juridisch de mogelijkheid – als het bedrijf de boel belazert – dat we dan kunnen ingrijpen.*

Interviewer: Maar die implementatie is dus eigenlijk weer typisch...

*Hollands poldermodel! Convenant 10 jaar en fantastisch! En Brussel vond het niks, die zeggen 'ja dat zijn die hollanders, zitten handjeklap te doen en belazeren de boel' Maar uiteindelijk heeft het fantastisch gewerkt*

Policy-maker 4, Dutch Water Authorities

Here, a respondent stages the example of reaching agreements as typically Dutch way of implementing European legislation, in which the soft approach is appreciated above a hard approach. This soft approach is, again, specifically linked to the Dutch Polder model.

#### 5.5.4 The role of cultural memory dynamics

Regarding independent oversight, it is clear that the policy community rejects the OECD recommendation. The previous section shows two things: first, the policy community mentions multiple underlying considerations that are linked with their rejection and second, these considerations are layered. Before assessing the role of cultural memory dynamics these considerations are summarized:

- At first sight, independent oversight is only perceived as a redundant measurement, because of already existing arrangements in the Dutch water management system. It does not add value and only adds to more complexity.
- The recommendation is understood as coming from an Anglo-Saxon background, while the policy community believes the Dutch system is better (less money for supervision, is more money for investments). Here it is seen that the considerations becomes more appreciative of a certain way.
- The recommendation even fails to see how well the Dutch system works. Till now, the characteristics of the Dutch system that were appreciated above other systems were tacit, but are made explicit.
- The characteristics that are ascribed to the Dutch system is a system in which hierarchy is absent, levels of cooperation and mutual trust are high, which leads to covenants that actually work. This is opposed to independent oversight that would fit in a context where trust and integrity is low. It is also mentioned that this is the way of the Polder model.

The Polder model is also mentioned as an existing specific way of governing in the OECD report. Respondents recognize and acknowledge this model. However, it interesting how respondents perceive the origins of this model:

*In mijn ogen vanuit de urgentie in Nederland om ons te beschermen tegen water. We hebben natuurlijk een cultuur – vanuit de waterschappen al heel lang – om met elkaar solidair te zijn en met elkaar een dijk te bouwen bijvoorbeeld. Waterschappen zijn zelfs het oudste democratische instituties en daar is van oudsher, wordt daar samengewerkt, want ja, je kunt niet in je eentje een dijk bouwen. Dat kun je beter samen doen. Dat polderen, ja het zit al in de naam, zit ook heel erg in het waterbeleid*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

According to this respondent, the Polder model here stands for a culture of solidarity and cooperation. Also, the level of cooperation is very high in this culture opposed to the level of hierarchy:



*Dat is dan eigenlijk weer het verhaal van...historisch verklaarbaar vanuit de behoefte om Nederland te beschermen tegen overstromingen, daar begint het dan toch een beetje mee. En dat het ook in de cultuur zit. We zijn toch een vrij platte...we zijn niet zo hiërarchisch ingesteld*

Policy-maker 3, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

The origins of the Polder model are connected with the century old Dutch activity of protecting themselves against floods. Thus, the way the policy community carries out their water governance is linked to a historical tradition. This is recognized by multiple respondents:

*We hebben altijd de strijd tegen het water moeten voeren. Nederland is natuurlijk al een paar millennia bewoond geweest en vanaf die zandgronden trokken mensen naar lager gelegen gebied omdat ze daar landbouw konden gaan doen. Maar ja, dan liep dat land weer onder. Dus op gegeven moment zijn ze dingen gaan bedenken om dat land droog te houden of te maken. Dat begon dan met terpen, maar op gegeven moment werden dat dijken. En de manier om die dijken te doen...dat waren eigenlijk gewoon groepen boeren die een dijkring maakten waarbinnen zij hun land konden ontginnen. En dat was eigenlijk het waterschap, eigenlijk een soort boerenvereniging die met elkaar afspraken van 'wij onderhouden die dijk, we pompen het droog en we gaan landbouw plegen' Vervolgens moesten ze het natuurlijk wel eens worden, want als één boer niet meedeed in het beheer of verzaakte te betalen of whatever, ja dan ging dat voor al die boeren mis. Dus ze waren op elkaar aangewezen om dat te doen. En zo is dat natuurlijk heel kleinschalig begonnen. Maar dat overlegmodel zou je kunnen...dat heeft er toch altijd wel achter gezeten. Dat is toch écht wel, qua governance, de bakermat geweest van hoe we dat in Nederland doen. En uiteindelijk is datzelfde poldermodel, het is natuurlijk letterlijk zo bedacht, maar ook naar andere sectoren getransponeerd...die bestuurscultuur zal ik maar zeggen, van het met elkaar eens zijn over wat je als doel hebt en dat dan met elkaar gaan regelen...en ook het eruit komen, want ja...de meerderheid kan ook niet altijd de minderheid overrulen, want als de minderheid toch niet meedoet dan heb je nog steeds een gat in je dijk. Dus ja, daar moet je met elkaar uitkomen. En dat ligt ook onder de SER en onder een hoop andere dingen. In die zin is dat ook wel grappig en ook wel weer leuk vind ik, dat de bestuurscultuur in Nederland denk ik heel erg, letterlijk en figuurlijk, door het poldermodel is gevormd.*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

A specific consultation model – the Polder model – is linked to historical events, namely the Dutch century-old relation with water. The respondent believes that this model still influences the administrative culture in the present and that this consultation model has transferred to other policy fields that are not about water management. Here, the SER (Social-Economic Council) is mentioned, which is a consultation body for employers and employees. This specific way of cooperating is typically Dutch:

*Maar voor Nederland is mijn hypothese dat die poldercultuur, die welwillendheid om samen te werken en die manier van aanpakken wel wezenlijk is...dat heeft toch te maken met hoe je al eeuwenlang een samenleving met elkaar vormt. En in Nederland is dit een heel wezenlijk ding geweest in het kunnen vormen van een samenleving*

Policy-maker 1, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment

Other respondents confirm this, stating also that other cooperation between different organizations has quite different outcomes:

*Over die samenwerking, als je bijvoorbeeld kijkt naar Brazilië, daar kennen die organisaties die wat met water te maken hebben elkaar niet eens! Laat staan dat die kunnen samenwerken*

Policy-maker 3, Dutch Water Authorities

The Netherlands is perceived as a country that stands out regarding other countries, also because it is a country of minorities:

*Het zit toch echt in het DNA. En als je naar Nederland kijkt, dan hebben wij vanwege coalitieakkoorden, land van minderbeden, zijn wij natuurlijk het polder...We hebben niet voor niks het poldermodel als een soort bestuursmodel. Of het altijd goed of fout is...maar kijk naar andere landen. Bijvoorbeeld Amerika, presidentsverkiezingen. Het is democratisch of republikeins Kijk naar Duitsland, die hebben dan ook coalitie, maar toch altijd wel meer links of rechts. En dat hebben wij ... wij hebben natuurlijk 100 jaar gehad dat we altijd kabinetten hadden..die waren centrumlinks of centrumrechts. Dus altijd met meerdere partijen, dus dat is ook gewoon een feitelijk te zien. En als je ziet hoe die bestuursorganen met elkaar omgaan, dan zie je daar ook dat dat veel minder puur op de macht is. Af en toe is dat natuurlijk nodig, maar er wordt toch altijd heel veel geprobeerd om er met praten uit te komen.*

Policy-maker 1, Dutch Water Authorities

Here, another reference to the past is made. According to this respondent, the composition of cabinets through the century is an example of how the Netherlands is forced to work together according to 'principles' of the Polder model. Here, structure (the Netherlands as a country of minorities) and culture (using the Polder model as administrative model) are blending together.

Concluding, the considerations that are underlying the perceptions and reactions of the Dutch water policy community regarding the OECD recommendation of independent oversight are laden with cultural memory dynamics. Members of the policy community that are spread among different organizations are making references to the past in their considerations. Although these references to the past may differ, they are related to the Polder model and are of great influence how the policy community perceives the OECD recommendations that is about independent oversight. The references to the past are laden with ideas about how members of the policy community perceive themselves (who are we?), but also how they perceive 'the others'. The recommendation of independent oversight stands for almost everything that respondents are not (or at least perceive it that way) or do not want to be. These views are expressed by multiple members of the policy community who work within different departments and within organizations.

## 6. Conclusion & Discussion

How does the remembrance of the polder model influence ideas about good water governance in het Netherlands?

### 6.1 Empirical conclusion

Interview data shows that the respondents are very positive about the OECD report and speak about it in an appreciative way in general. Regarding the specific recommendations, only the awareness gap and the financial arrangements are perceived positively. Subsequently, this positive perception for both of these recommendations has led to action too. In their considerations to do so, no references to the past, to cultural memories or the Polder model specifically has been made. In case of the financial arrangements, only when asking respondents directly about how the polluter pays principle relates to the Polder model, two noteworthy things were stated: firstly, one respondent considered the link irrelevant, because the most important condition regarding this the financial recommendations was feasibility. Another respondent pointed out that the Polder model relates only to a way of working together and not to the content of policy. Still, the polluter pays principle seems to be aligned with the image of 'who are we' that comes with the Polder model, namely the idea of cooperation and taking responsibility for your own share of the problem.

The recommendation regarding independent oversight is much more controversial among the respondents and within their considerations. Cultural memory dynamics seem to be very present and of significant influence. The remembrance of the Polder model plays a central role in these dynamics, although arguments that are linked with structure (opposed to culture) are too part of the considerations for *not* taking action. The argument about structure is that independent oversight is a bad fit with the Dutch institutional design. What characterizes this design is that oversight, monitoring and checks & balances are already sufficiently secured within the institutional structure.

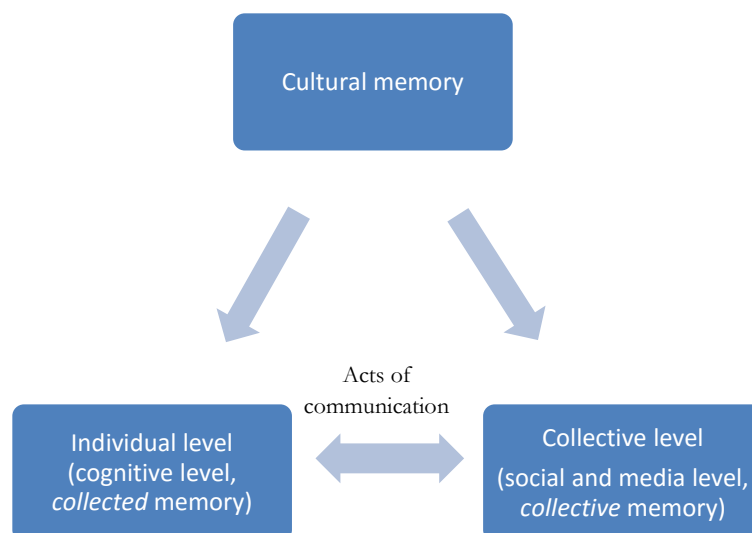
Some respondents perceive the OECD recommendation as an Anglo-Saxon idea, formulated by non-Dutch writers who were probably not able to fully appreciate the already existing and unique Dutch system. This is where arguments of structure overlap with arguments that are linked to culture. The Anglo-Saxon 'style' of institutional design – opposed to the Dutch model (also mentioned as the Rhineland model) - relates to actual structure on the one hand, but also to ideas about good governance and which kind of design is a better fit with a specific administrative culture. When respondents are encouraged to make the characteristics of this Dutch system explicit, most of them come up with the same elements, namely a system in which mutual trust and integrity among cooperating partners is very high, while there is no difference in hierarchical status between those partners. These characteristics are often summarized under the umbrella of the Polder model in the view of the respondents. The Polder model is expressed in the Dutch tradition of making 'soft' covenants, instead of hard rules, in which the latter is ascribed to other, more centralistic countries. Furthermore, a sense of pride is often present when respondent

elaborate on this<sup>16</sup>, for instance when respondents refer to examples in which the Polder model proves its advantages, while other countries fail to be as good in managing water as the Dutch.

When respondents are asked how this system came to be, a lot of references to the past are made. Within those references, the Polder model plays a central role. The Polder model stands for this specific and unique Dutch way of working together, which is in their DNA, because the people in the Netherlands were forced to do so when they first built dykes, drained swamps and needed to work together to keep their collective feet dry. Another cultural memory applies to the transferring of the Polder model to other policy fields besides water management. The fact that the Polder model is also applied to other policy field besides water management is an indication that the memory of the Polder model is very strong and firmly imbedded in the cultural schemata of the policy community. Striking is the fact that these remembrance of the Polder model are not individual or isolated memories, but are mentioned by different members of the water policy community who work in separated organizations. This means that so called *acts of communication* are happening, keeping those cultural memories alive by reconstruction in the present.

## 6.2 Theoretical conclusion

Cultural memory theory focuses on how the past is constructed in the present, whether this is historically correct or not. The main element of the empirical part of this thesis were the interviews, held with individual members of a policy community. Taking the conceptualization of cultural memory into account, one could say that the main focus of this study relates to the individual level:



As mentioned in section 2.4 of this thesis, questions on the individual level would be: ‘How are policy-makers and other involved actors informed by this cultural memory? How does it influence their perception of ‘who are we and who are the others’, their perception of good and bad policy and hence the influence on their actions?’ These kind of questions are indirectly addressed by investigating the perceptions, reactions and considerations of the Dutch water policy community regarding the OECD recommendations.

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<sup>16</sup> Something that is hard to make explicit on paper.

Taking the OECD' recommendations and the policy community's perceptions, reactions and considerations into account, it is clear that the cultural memory of the Polder model plays an important role in the recommendation regarding independent oversight. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse how members of the policy community are informed through this cultural memory, how the remembrance of the Polder model influences their perception of 'who are we and who are the others' and how it influences their ideas about good water governance. Another point of interest is why this cultural memory only comes up in case of this specific recommendation.

It is clear that cultural memory dynamics is of influence regarding the considerations of the members of the policy community and mostly in case of the recommendation regarding independent oversight. The recommendation of independent oversight conflicts in a fundamental way with how the policy community perceives the question of 'who are we and who are the others'. However, this is not the case in the recommendations regarding the awareness gap and the financial arrangements. The analysis shows that this can be understood when looking how the policy community constructs their identity and the extent to which the recommendation touches upon these constructions. Cultural memory dynamics are closely linked with the question 'who are we and who are the others'. However, it is not always necessary to construct and reconstruct identity. Identity is something that is tacit and only becomes more explicit in the occasion when this identity is challenged.

In case of the recommendation of independent oversight, the identity of the Dutch water policy community is challenged or attacked in a fundamental way. The recommendation asks the policy community to implement a certain policy that opposes the characteristics of their identity (which are outlined above). Subsequently, the policy community uses the cultural memory of the Polder model to reconstruct their identity and to legitimize why the recommendation of independent oversight is of poor quality, taking the specific characteristics of the Dutch water policy community into account, as well the institutional landscape in which they operate. Considering these identity dynamics, it is also understandable why cultural memory dynamics are mostly absent in the other recommendations. Because the recommendations of the awareness gap and the financial arrangements do not fundamentally challenge the identity of the policy community ('who are we and who are the others') it is not necessary to (re)construct cultural memories.

Connecting the empirical findings to the analytical scheme, we can conclude that the Dutch water policy is informed by the memory of the Polder model, given the fact that multiple respondents from separate organizations recognize themselves and identify themselves with the characteristics that come with Polder model. This is also an indication that this cultural memory is reconstructed through acts of communication between members of the policy community. Visible acts of communication could relate to the sealed covenants between water management organization as a symbol of the functioning of the Polder model, such as the National Administrative Agreement on Water. Respondents refer to certain covenants as a typical example of cooperation which is intensely linked with memories of the Dutch Polder model.

What is even more clear is that the remembrance of the Polder model is very influential regarding the policy community's perception on the question 'who are we and who are the others', which is about identity. This becomes especially explicit when the community has to deal with a

recommendation that fundamentally challenges the way of working that comes with this identity. Because the recommendation of independence oversight is associated with cultural memories of ‘who are we *not*’, this recommendation is perceived as bad policy. This could also be an explanation of why these dynamics are less present regarding the recommendation of the awareness gap and the financial arrangements. Because these latter recommendations do not touch upon cultural memories that are linked with identity, cultural memory dynamics are not present in the policy community’s underlying considerations to take action yes or no.

### 6.3 Discussion

The aim of connecting a cultural memory perspective with policy analysis is to shed light on a certain kind of dynamics that are not directly visible when looking at (often) rationally and technically formulated policy documents. The assumption behind this perspective is that policy debates happen within a policy community; a community that consists of members that share a history and actively remember this history in order to make sense of their identity. Cultural memory dynamics play an important role in reconstructing the past in the present. This study is an attempt to explore how the theoretical insights regarding a fruitful connection between cultural memory theory and policy analysis can be applied on an empirical case.

Before starting the research, there was a hunch that in the case of the OECD recommendations and the Dutch water policy community’s perceptions, reactions and considerations, cultural memory dynamics would be of influence. Indeed, especially the recommendation about independent oversight touched upon many reconstructions of the past in the present. These reconstructions are not directly visible in policy documents or directly accessible when talking to members of the policy community. The analysis however shows that cultural memory dynamics *do* influence the policy process. Assessing policy from this perspective thus can give insights about how policy communities perceive themselves and subsequently how this influences ideas about good and bad policy, hence policy outcomes. For instance, in the case of independent oversight, arguments that were formulated for disagreement were linked with cultural memories. Analyzing the impact of this recommendation from another perspective would probably kept the researcher in the dark regarding insight in the reasons why a policy community rejects certain recommendation. Considering the fact that policy makers tend to communicate mostly in technocratic and rational language (especially in policy documents), the cultural memory perspective on policy process is of extra value in elucidating the less visible but influencing dynamics that are linked with memory.

The conclusions also show that the cultural memory perspective adds worthwhile insights in understanding which (often tacit) dynamics that are related to culture, memory and identity influence policy processes. The influence of cultural memory should not be underestimated. This is shown by the way how an extensive OECD recommendation is dismissed for reasons that are not really about the content of the recommendation, but primarily related to the way the recommendation challenges the constructed identity by the policy community. This gives reason to further research the influence of cultural memory dynamics in the field of Public Administration. A lot of questions about the influencing role of cultural memory dynamics on policy processes are still unanswered, for instance:

- When policy recommendations challenge a policy community's identity, are cultural memories always reconstructed in order to re-establish the identity? Or are there cases in which the identity is reconstructed in a different way, in which the recommendation at hand gets 'a pass'?
- In case of the Polder model: why is the Polder model such a strong cultural memory? Did the memory change over time and was it ever remembered differently? If so, for what purposes? Where does the reconstruction of the Polder model memory come from? Is it employed intentionally or unintentionally in the past? These questions relate to the collective level from the analytical scheme used in this thesis.
- To what extent can the influence of a cultural memory dynamics on policy be constructive or destructive? Is there a way to tell how policy can benefit from cultural memory dynamics? If so, which party should assess these questions - which are more normative -, researchers, policy makers or other parties?

These kind of questions can inspire future case studies in which the role of cultural memory on policy is further investigated. At this point it is unclear what different forms the influence of cultural memories can take. What is clear though, is the relevance of cultural memory theory for policy analysis. It informs us about the reasons why policy is implemented or not. These reasons are linked with identity and the role of references to the past to construct this identity. These dynamics are not covered by other worthwhile approaches for analyzing policy (as addressed in chapter 2). This is a strong argument for the added value of cultural memory theory for policy analysis. Future research will tell if the cultural memory approach can develop to an independent policy analysis perspective.

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