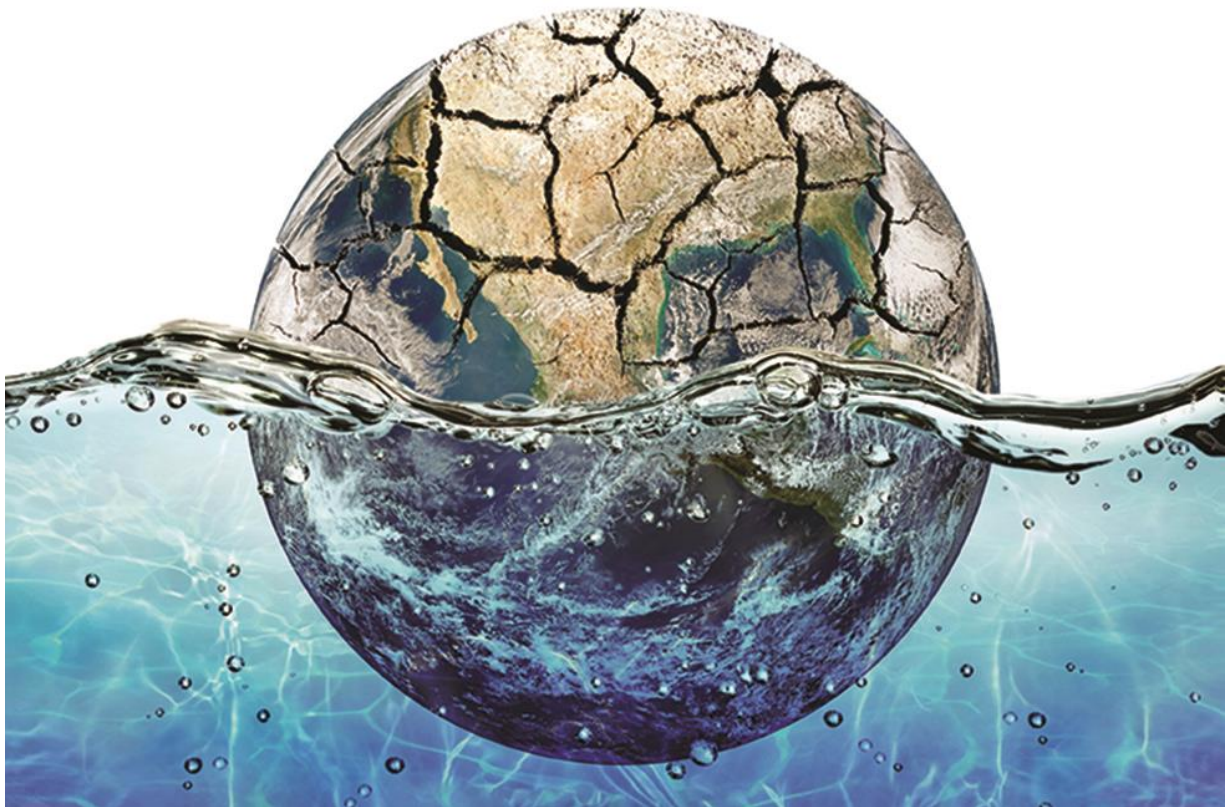


The formation of Dutch economic water diplomacy

The story behind the development of sectoral economic diplomacy of the Netherlands as water country: driven by knowledge communities or other interests?



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II. Abstract

A well-functioning democracy requires transparent decision making in policy formation. To this end, this research aims to investigate the development process of the Dutch foreign water agenda between 1999-2014. Instead of looking at international trends, this research aims to unravel the domestic events shaping this policy, and to discover the role that knowledge has played in it. This role is investigated through Haas' framework of "epistemic communities", which looks at the influences of expert communities' on policy development for non-self-interest purposes. It is found that the Dutch foreign water agenda started with integration of the water sector and increased international efforts, largely for contributing to the Millennium Development Goals, followed around 2010 by an increased focus on national economic self-interest. While the integration efforts were stimulated by an epistemic community with the regional water authorities at the forefront, the increase focus on economic diplomacy and liberal development aid was found to not have enjoyed the support of any epistemic community. Furthermore, the water authorities were at first a respected informal head of the epistemic community, but later, under threat of abolishment, became a tool for politicians to shape their liberal ideas of national economic interest at the cost of development goals. This liberal, economic diplomacy focus seems to have been kickstarted by the economic crisis starting in 2008, together with a liberal government that likes to promote itself as protagonists for the private sector. This means that episteme did play a role in the integration of Dutch foreign water efforts, but its economic focus should be explained otherwise.

1. Introduction

1.1 This research

This thesis research aims to discover the internal process of the development of the Dutch foreign water agenda during the years 1999 and 2014. During this period, this sector-based foreign policy has developed through integration of involved actors and an increased focus on economic diplomacy. Economic diplomacy is not a new concept and tends to appear in countries' foreign policy in a cyclical manner. Even though the reasons for governments to engage in economic diplomacy are relatively well-researched, internal negotiation and policy development of economic diplomacy as important foreign policy instrument are not. By researching this subject through an epistemic communities framework, this thesis aims to provide more insight in this internal process, which can unravel whether this policy has been based on the notion of "objective facts", as recommended by unbiased experts, or whether other factors or actors played a role in the change of large public money allocations. Though before describing the research and its results, the Dutch water sector's definition, history and foreign aspects should be introduced to provide the context. This introduction will be followed by a historiography on economic diplomacy, after which the problem statement and research questions are described, and the analytical framework explained. After this, the research results will be discussed per sub-question, followed by a conclusion.

1.2 What is the Dutch water sector?

The Netherlands is often regarded as "water country", with its water sector seen as one of the important economic sectors of the country. But what is this water sector exactly? Various definitions exist. www.dutchwatersector.com, an initiative from government and non-government organisations provides a broad definition of the water sector: Resilient cities, enabling delta life, water and agri-food, water for all, smart information solutions, water technology, and even mining and education. This broad definition might make sense to attract potential costumers, but it is less convenient as object of research. The Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP), a network for organisations in the water sector, focusses on urban resilience, water technology, water & agri-food, and water & crisis, as can be seen on their own website: <https://www.netherlandswaterpartnership.com/>. The national government itself has defined its water (and maritime) sector as one of its nine most important sectors, branded the Dutch top sectors. This classification defines the water sector through the subsectors of delta technology, maritime technology and water technology. It must be noted though that many of the other top sectors include a water or maritime aspect as well, namely the top sectors of Agri & food, chemistry, creative industry, energy, logistics and horticulture & starting materials, according to their own website: <http://www.topsectorwater.nl/>.

The fact that the water sector is this broad, while other sectors include water elements as well, demands a clear research definition of the water sector. As many of the abovementioned subsectors can easily be classified as a completely different sector, like agriculture, IT, and maritime technologies, these will be left out of this research definition. This research will focus on the water sector's prime aspects: flood & drought management and sanitation. Flood and drought prevention will include physical engineering structures, as well as environmental adaptations to reduce water quantity issues. Sanitation, according to the World Health Organisation's official website: <https://www.who.int/topics/sanitation/en/>, can be defined as: '[...] [T]he provision of facilities and services for the safe management of human excreta from the toilet to containment and storage and treatment onsite or conveyance, treatment and eventual safe end use or disposal.' (WHO 2019)

On both these themes, the Netherlands enjoys a prominent international reputation. As an economic sector, in terms of contribution to GDP and number of employees, the water sector scores worst of the nine identified top-sectors (MT MediaGroep 2011). Why then is the water sector identified as such an important sector, and even sometimes seen as part of our national identity? To discover its importance, we must dive into the history of the Dutch water sector.

1.3 General history of the Dutch water sector

The Netherlands and water are strongly connected. Since the first settlements in what we now call the Netherlands, water has been both a vital friend as well as a formidable enemy. The Netherlands, a delta area formed by large European rivers like the Rhine and Meuse, is, in terms of water management, characterised by its flood risk, both from the sea as from rivers, fertile floodplains and a crossroad for the transport of goods because of its connection with the North Sea and the European hinterland. At the same time, the high population density and high urbanisation rate demanded extended sanitation efforts as well as food production (Toonen 1993).

After living on mounds for some centuries, the Dutch began their first notable organisation considering water management: the construction of the first dike, around 1000 A.D. At the same time, land reclamation began in coastal areas, shallow lakes and peat exploitation areas. The Dutch solution for the hereby required communal organisation were the regional water authorities, the first of which was installed in the 13th century. These authorities are still the main responsible bodies in flood and drought prevention, as well as water quality assurance, and they are the oldest political authorities in the Netherlands. In modern times, these authorities cooperate intensively with knowledge institutes, ministries and the private sector (Toonen 1993). The result of this cooperation can be seen in some icons of Dutch water management: the Afsluitdijk, the 30 km dam creating the Netherlands' 12th province and the Delta Works, named as one of the seven modern engineering wonders of the world (Minkman and Van Buuren 2019).

Considering sanitation, another vital part of water management, the Netherlands started its first sewage and water treatment efforts early in the 20th century. In this era, cities and small regions were responsible for their own sanitation efforts. After the second world war, increased cooperation for larger projects was required, like for expensive water treatment plants and countering upstream-downstream water issues. After decades of changing policies, the Netherlands eventually chose for a public, regional approach for delivering drink water, with a performance monitoring and stimulation role for the national government. These public entities often contract private sector actors for execution of tasks and inventing and delivering new technologies. Eventually, this led to a vivid private technology sector to meet the constant demand of improvement. Nowadays, the Netherlands has a 100% sanitation coverage, uses no chlorine in water treatment, and supplies the water at relatively low costs. The technologies and innovations developed in this system, often by small niche companies, are an important export product nowadays (Zetland and Colenbrander 2018).

1.4 Contemporary importance of the Dutch water sector

In present days, the Dutch water sector has two main functions: 1) Contributing to the reduction of water management issues and increasing sanitation results, both in the Netherlands as abroad, and 2) being an important economic sector generating jobs and money abroad and in the country itself (Topteam water 2011).

Considering the first goal, the role of the government is obvious. The private and knowledge actors, in their turn, are the ones coming up with innovations for water quality increase, efficiency improvements, and cost reduction. They perform this role both in the Netherlands, as abroad: universities participate in foreign research together with local actors, and private companies often

design and execute projects abroad. This allows for the sharing of expertise, knowledge and technology over the world, while not forgetting to make profit out of it (Minkman and Van Buuren 2019).

This last point leads us to the importance of this economic sector. In 2014, the Dutch water sector, as defined earlier, employed about 42.000 professionals and made a total revenue of about €9 billion, of which about 30% comes from abroad. These numbers have grown a respective seven and ten and percent over the previous five years and are expected to keep growing in the near future. (consultancy.nl 2016). Though as stated earlier, more important economic sectors exist, and the water sector only contributes 0.4% to the Dutch GDP, but expected growth makes contributes to its role as priority sector.

Some of the current global trends are catalysts for this witnessed and expected further growth of the Dutch water sector. First of all, global climate change leads to various new challenges considering water management and sanitation. Sea levels are rising, causing higher flood risks and increased salt water intrusion in fresh water bodies. More variable weather patterns cause increase rain intensity, and at the same time, less yearly rainfall in many dry areas. Secondly, the global population is growing exponentially, and upcoming economic powers in Latin America, Asia and Africa strive to provide their citizens with living conditions matching those of the West, increasing sanitation demands and water use per capita (Vörösmarty et al 2000).

1.5 The Dutch foreign policy

The Netherlands foreign policy does not only focus on the water sector though. In general, it is based on promoting liberal democracy, international cooperation and stimulating international trade, economic development, human rights and the rule of law. International organisations like the World Trade Organisation, the United Nations and the European Union are important instruments and guides for the foreign policy of this small country (Rijksoverheid 2011).

The Dutch foreign policy in terms of economic and development cooperation are integrated with the concept of Aid & Trade. The fundamental idea behind this is that the eventual goal should be to help countries grow from aid receivers to trade partners. Not only is being a trade partner the eventual goal though, but also an end to be stimulated by supplying support to economic growth in the aid receiving country, as well as by involving the private sector to allow them to do what they are good at: create jobs and increase economic productivity. The policy aim is to combine aid and trade to create mutual benefits for both the Netherlands and the receiving country. This is done through stimulating market access and improving the business environment, sometimes even directly stimulating the participation in projects of Dutch private companies, while at the same time investing in poverty reduction (Rijksoverheid 2011). One of the key tools for aid & trade is economic diplomacy, which will be explored in the next chapter.

2 Historiography

Economic diplomacy, in the broad sense of the word, is a concept already applied to international politics for thousands of years. Trade posts, economic sanctions and government support have been used by ancient Greeks and Romans, throughout the Mediterranean and during the exploration era of European powers throughout. In modern diplomacy, economic diplomacy often plays an important role in foreign policy of nation states, including that of upcoming powers like China, Brazil and Japan (Saner and Yiu 2003).

As states are deeply concerned with their domestic economic development, it makes sense that politicians of trade-orientated countries have interest in supporting their domestic economy through foreign policy. This is nothing new. In fact, 13th century northern Italian city states, which laid the foundation for modern diplomacy, already recognised the importance of political importance in trade, and hence, in economic diplomacy. Before this era, economic might was largely dependent on agricultural production, hence on territorial might, but Italian merchants became wealthy and thereby powerful through trading between the west and the middle east. Military might to secure lands was reduced in importance, while trade would become a major economic driver for the centuries to come, including the time we live in now (Coolsaet 1998).

Global economic integration and globalisation are often seen as being directly linked with economic diplomacy, as they make international trade a more important economic factor for the domestic politics, hence for politicians. However, globalisation is nothing new. Globalisation is a long-term process, which some would say already started with the discovery of the Americas in 1492 (O'Rourke and Williamson 2002), or much later with the establishment of the Bretton Woods system in 1944 (Nayyar 2006). One could even argue that a degree of globalisation took place during the Roman empire, as not only Mediterranean interconnectedness grew, but other parts of Europe were directly affected, and a trade network established between the Roman economy, eastern Africa and even going as far as China (Gilbert and Reynolds 2011).

Economic diplomacy, has not always received the same amount of attention throughout history though. Government focus on economic diplomacy, seems to rise and fall cyclically throughout history. A case study of Belgium economic diplomacy, for example, identifies 4 different periods during the last 200 years in which the economy was the most important aspect of foreign policy (Coolsaet 2001). For the Netherlands, foreign policy is often seen as a battleground between the "merchant" and the "preacher": a centuries old concept depicting the moral dilemma of economic gains versus doing good for your fellow people. Considering the modern Dutch foreign policy, the merchant has prevailed for some decades after WWII, while the preacher dominated the foreign policy from the 80's onwards (Hoebink 2006), with, as will be shown later, seeing the merchant re-appearing in contemporary policy.

While the arguments to engage in economic diplomacy are quite straightforward: self-interest through increased national revenue hence taxes (Kotabe and Czinkota 1992), positive image setting (Potter 2004), and creating a win-win situation in economic growth, though the last can be questioned on its validity as an argument. These arguments however do not explain the cyclical trend in economic diplomacy. Sometimes, this is attributed to domestic developments like private sector lobbies, personal convictions of certain ministers, or domestic political developments (Hoebink 2006). In terms of global trends, Coolsaet (1998) identified potential international factors that can explain an increased focus on economic diplomacy: International institutions have taken over other roles of the foreign ministries, like security (NATO), trade treaties (EU), power balancing issues (UN), and trade tariffs and barriers (WTO), while economic diplomacy in terms of export promotion is still left to the state.

Though the true cyclical nature of the re-appearance of economic diplomacy cannot just be explained by these multilateral developments, as these multilateral organisations did not exist in such a strong way in other times of increased economic diplomacy focus. Okano-Heijmans (2011) explains this cyclical trend, as well as the current increased interest for economic diplomacy: changes in the global political system. She argues that when power shifts, as is happening today from a unipolar towards a multi-polar system, economic diplomacy is a valuable policy instrument for pursuing national interests and the prevarication of the current economic system in a peaceful way. She explains that keeping the current economic world order in place, is beneficial for the countries currently dominating this economic world order. On the other hand, upcoming countries like China possess a different preferred view of economic order and the public-private relation. Economic diplomacy could be seen as a way of countering Chinese attempts to change the status quo in this context.

But even though international trends can be discovered, but this still does not explain why some countries join these trends and others do not. Neither does it explain why countries join, why at a specific time, and how. The Netherlands, for example, has been relatively late in its focus on economic diplomacy (Coolsaet 1998). Another important aspect of the Dutch economic diplomacy that should not be overlooked either is its sectoral approach, which is not only seen in the Netherlands. China is currently involved in huge economic diplomacy efforts considering infrastructure, as can be seen in the New Silk Road (Callaghan and Hubbard 2016), but also in projects in Latin America (Gransow 2015) and Africa (Kaplinsky and Morris 2009), where ports, railroads and roads are constructed by the hundreds. Sectoral economic diplomacy is nothing new for European countries either, as especially smaller countries like Finland focussing on ten specific sectors, according to their own business promotion website <https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/do-business-with-finland/home/>. Czech Republic employing agriculture and technology experts at embassies (MZV 2010). This development, however seems to be relatively new, being triggered by globalisation which forces specialisation, especially of small and middle-sized countries (Klem and Kester 2011). Though not all small and middle-sized countries engaged in economic diplomacy, take this sectoral approach. Even Belgium, neighbour to the Netherlands, and with similar economic conditions, does not focus on certain sectors, according to the Belgium's foreign affairs official website: https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/economic_diplomacy. So what explains this different focus?

So research has been dedicated towards global and regional trends in increased focus towards economic diplomacy. This however does not say anything about the domestic dynamics in a country considering economic diplomacy. Even though international trends might exist, this does not yet force all countries to partake, nor determine the focus of international diplomacy. Eventually, it is a national government that must take the initiative to increase economic diplomacy efforts. How this comes about still largely unknown, though several theories can be applied. That is what this thesis would like to contribute to.

3. Problem statement and research question

3.1 Problem statement and its relevance

The current foreign policy focusses on the combination of aid and trade, for which the water sector is an important focus point. As explained, economic diplomacy, with or without a sectoral focus, is not new in this world, but this does not mean that it is a vastly research field. Global trends might have received some attention, but the “internal process” badly known: Why do some countries engage in economic diplomacy, and other not? Why is this policy implemented at certain times, and not earlier or later? Why is an economic diplomacy policy shaped the way it is, with or without sectoral focus?

To provide some more insight in these questions, the Dutch situation offers an interesting case study. The Netherlands has a long history of water management and sanitation, but the foreign water policy as we know it right now is relatively new, as we shall see later on, starting its development roughly around between the change of the millennium and the following one and a half year. The water sector, for the Netherlands is of importance because of multiple reasons: domestic jobs and money generation, but also as an instrument to contribute to global human wellbeing and sustainable development. The importance of global water management and sanitation issues is expected to grow thanks to climate change and population growth, just like the importance of this sector for the Dutch economy, as well as the global importance of Dutch knowledge for countering these global issues.

The Netherlands focusses on sectoral economic diplomacy, hence allocated public resources towards it. Public policy, hence public spending will always know winners and losers, so choices and the development process should be as transparent. Currently, some discussion about public spending stirred up in the Netherlands, like the abolition of dividend taxes, for the benefit of foreign stockholders. It turned out that this policy change was not proposed by “objective knowledge”, after all it was a financial measure that the Ministry of Finance disagreed with, but followed from years private sector lobbying (Jacobs 2018, Van Teefelen 2017). At the same time, faith in politicians has decreased throughout the Western world (Greven 2016). Transparency in public policy, vital for a democracy and public trust in politicians, has shown not always to be optimal (Hollyer et al 2018). This transparency is exactly what this research aims to offer by discovering the role of knowledge in the development of the Dutch foreign water agenda, through the framework of “epistemic communities”: expert communities build around certain knowledge, as will be further explained in the next chapter.

3.2 Research questions

In order to research the role of knowledge in the development of the Dutch foreign water policy, this research has formulated some research questions to answer the following main research question:

- What was the role of epistemic communities in the development of the major policy change of the Dutch foreign water policy during 1999-2014?

In order to answer this research question, it is important to first understand exactly what happened when, and with what arguments, in the policy development, followed by the identification of potential epistemic communities surrounding the ideas behind these changes, and last how these identified communities interacted with policy makers. This leads to the following sub-research questions:

- What changed exactly in the Dutch foreign water agenda considering involved organisations, methods, goals, and arguments during 1999-2014?
- What epistemic communities formed considering the ideas behind these major identified changes?
- How did these identified epistemic communities interact with the policy makers?

4. Theoretical framework

Policies are being made for almost every aspect in human lives these days. Even though many different definitions of “policy” are given, it is not a very contested term, as all definitions include key words like “action” or “plan” for guiding “decisions” “actions” towards certain “(material) interests”, “goals” or “expedient” (Free Dictionary 2019: Merriam-Webster 2019). Adding the word public simply restricts the policy to be coming from public government (Cambridge Dictionary 2019).

The definition used in this document will be: “A plan used by public governments to pursue actions towards the government’s goals”. This means that the public policy change analysis would have to focus on changing plans or goals of the government in the field subject to the analysis.

The change of such a policy is a rather complex object of research since it can be approached in different ways: rational arguments, agents of change, internal politics, external factors, moral debate, and more. Each different approach would lead to different outcomes, one not more valuable than the other, just seen at a different scale or through other glasses. The most dominant approaches for researching policy change can be subdivided in “rational approaches” and “networks” (True et al 1999, 12).

Each of these approaches lays the focus on another aspect and consequently using other tools, concepts and focusses on the origins and process of policy development. Some focus on governments’ rational seeking of self-interest, while others provide insight in how different interest groups or networks pursue their own (self-)interests in policy development. The focus of this research will be guided by the concept of epistemic communities: a concept allowing for the investigation of the domestic debate surrounding policy formation.

The epistemic communities concept arose in International Relations in the 70’s, as a factor of influence on international institutionalisation (Ruggie 1972), but the concept was not used often yet. In the 90’s, the concept re-emerged. Were it used to be a factor for investigation, Haas introduced it as an analytical framework. In this way, Haas proposed, a framework combining rational choice and network analysis: the epistemic community analysis. An epistemic community, a community of experts build around a certain *episteme*, or knowledge in English. In his introduction of the framework in 1992, Haas defines the epistemic community as following:

‘An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.’ (Haas 1992, 3)

He follows this definition by providing four conditions that a group should apply to, in order to be able to be branded an epistemic community:

‘They have

- (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members
- (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes
- (3) shared notions of validity that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise and

- (4) a common policy enterprise-that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence' (Haas 1992, 3)

It are these 4 conditions that set epistemic communities apart from other actor networks, which for example are bound together by idealism, self-interests or shared practices (Davis-Cross 2013).

Haas and Adler developed the epistemic communities approach because recognised a need for a reflective approach to explain 'the sources of international institutions, state interests and state behaviour under conditions of uncertainty' (Adler and Haas 1992, 5). The idea behind this new approach is to open research for empirical study of ideas, and how these influenced eventual policy in international relations. The analysis of policy change through epistemic communities allows for the uncovering of the interactions between international as well as domestic structures and choice, while not disregarding the notions of knowledge and facts. Even more important, it allows for the analysis of how knowledge precipitates into policy, and why certain power has a certain degree of influence (Adler and Haas 1992).

Especially in current times, international relations are more complex than before, due to increased interconnectedness, shared power between different actors, and un-transparent relations and interests. This increases the need for new analytical methods, as these issues cannot easily be integrated in for example realistic approaches, which reduce the influence of non-state actors and only focus on self-interest. Approaches like neoliberal institutionalism partially counter this view by explaining the value of international cooperation through institutions, countering the idea of pure anarchy. However, this approach partly neglects the role of knowledge and the domestic bargaining as part of international policy development. The epistemic communities approach, according to Haas, can contribute to these debates by focussing on these domestic developments, politics and other groups, through their interaction. By focussing on epistemic communities, instead of focussing on interests, the focus shifts towards negotiation and bargaining between groups possessing different sets of knowledge, and their consequential influence on policy makers (Dunlop 2000).

Analyses through the epistemic communities approach aim to discover how networks of knowledgeable persons on a specific subject, organise themselves in groups, which, through different ways, can influence policy development. Though the composition and nature of these communities can vary greatly. This makes it an interesting point of view for exploring the Dutch foreign water policy. As this policy is not clearly the responsibility of a single actor, nor necessarily centralised or directly guided, ownership of the policy as a whole is very diffused. Adding to this, the water sector is relatively technocratic field, dominated by water experts, who could potentially almost possess a monopoly on the policy development. This gives the impression that policy in the water sector can be vastly guided by epistemic communities.

Like all frameworks, the epistemic community framework has not gone without criticism. One important point of critique is that when focussing on epistemic communities, other important actors or events are too easily disregarded. Often, epistemic communities will not be the only communities trying to influence policy making, nor will they per definition be the most influential (Toke 1999: Krebs 2001). It is even argued that epistemic communities, despite consisting of experts, might not even be the best at problem solving, as politicians have more experience when dealing with uncertainty and crises. (Toke 1999). It can also be questioned what the intentions of epistemic communities really are? It might be simply naïve to assume that self-interest is not a factor of motivation at all in their efforts (Krebs 2001). It is also stated that by involving themselves in policy making, epistemic communities consequently become political actors as well, entering the "tit for that arena", instead of staying

objective, philanthropist experts (Sebenius 1992). A last criticism worth mentioning is the vague description of an epistemic communities, as it is being based on different shared beliefs and knowledge, as explained earlier, which can be interpreted very broadly (Dunlop 2000)

Some of this criticism has been countered again by Dunlop (2000), claiming that indeed the four points defining epistemic communities separately might allow for a large variety of groups to be considered epistemic communities, though the distinctiveness comes from the fact that each of the four conditions should be met unconditionally, restricting the ability for too broad interpretation. Dunlop also claims that the epistemic communities approach was never meant to receive a monopolistic position, rather be seen as one of many influencing factors, and politicians and policy makers generally should and do listen to other influences and concerns, though the epistemic communities are important for objective knowledge input. So even though some of the criticism can be countered, it is important to realise the previously mentioned drawbacks of this approach while using it.

The concept of epistemic communities in international relations is mostly being used to analyse transnational cooperation or policy making. This research, however, has a slightly different focus within international relations, which is the international policy of a specific country, hence the influence of epistemic communities on a national government's choices. Even though this theme does not form the majority of research with this concept, this research will not be the first one either. For example, King (2005) analysed England's national bank reform in 1997 through looking at epistemic communities, Adler (1992) looked at the influence of a domestic epistemic community on American, and later Soviet perceptions of nuclear arms control. Marier (2008) investigated domestic pension reforms in Chili through empowering Chilean epistemic communities with Swedish politicians. Sandal (2011) even shows us the influence of religious actors functioning as epistemic communities in national conflict resolution in two different countries.

Concluding, the epistemic communities focus of this research could add to the knowledge of why is economic diplomacy adopted by countries at certain times, and why it is given shape the way it is. Through this approach, the focus can be put on the domestic policy arena, and the role that knowledge instead of interest play in the policy development process. At the same time, it will not only add to knowledge about policy development, but on the use of the framework itself. It has been used before to analyse domestic developments, but not in great numbers. The rapid development of the Dutch foreign water agenda, combined with the sector being dominated by technocratic experts, make it an excellent object of research for this approach.

5. Methodology

Now that the idea and theoretical framework of this thesis have been explained, the next question is how it will be researched. The methodology used in this research will be described per sub-question.

5.1 What changed exactly in the Dutch foreign water agenda considering involved organisations, methods, goals, and arguments during 1999-2014??

To identify the changes and their arguments during the set period in the Dutch foreign water agenda, this research will identify what the relevant actors for the Dutch water sector abroad did at certain times, and how this was linked to actual policy. Given that it is about policy, the focus will be on government and semi-government actors, but including their interaction with the private sector. Main sources used are the government coalition agreements, which are thoroughly searched for mentioning of the Dutch water sector abroad and trends in development cooperation. The policy letters of the water authorities are another useful tool to identify the determined policies over time. The magazine of the Dutch water authorities will be searched for similar terms as the coalition agreements, with all magazines between 1995 and 2014 being researched. Other sources will be other official policy documents and official evaluations. Altogether, these sources will provide the information required to reconstruct the content of the Dutch foreign water agenda over time. Involved organisations, used methods and set goals will receive focus, together with the given arguments behind these changes.

5.2 What epistemic communities formed considering the ideas behind these major identified changes?

When the changes and their arguments in the Dutch foreign water policy have been identified, these will be the starting points for identifying the epistemic communities behind these ideas. The epistemic communities, after all, will have to be formed around a specific episteme. If the community is successful, this episteme will form a principal argument in the development of the policy as such. Therefore, this sub-research question will look at expert opinions and communities around the main identified arguments behind the policy change. Official government advising bodies and text will be examined, as well as trends in the relevant knowledge displayed in the magazine of the water authorities. As epistemic communities are not limited by national borders, international literature and advisory bodies will be included, next to the Dutch documents. Expert opinion statements will provide additional sources of information considering the identified arguments. When putting all these expert opinions and discussions together, it can be determined whether an actual community supported these arguments. To establish whether these were epistemic communities, the communities should comply with Haas' four conditions, as previously described:

- A shared set of normative and principled beliefs
- Shared causal beliefs
- Shared notions of validity
- A common policy enterprise.

5.3 How did these epistemic communities interact with the policy makers?

If, after the identification of the arguments behind the policy formation, epistemic communities surrounding these arguments are identified, it is still important to investigate the interaction between these epistemic communities and the policy makers. It is important to identify which recommendations of the epistemic communities have been taken over by the politicians, and how, when and why this happened. The interaction can best be found in the magazine of the water authorities, as well as in statements and actions of politicians considering the policy. It is also important to see how the representatives of the epistemic communities, as well as policy makers, present the

policy changes towards the community. In addition, some supplementary influences in the timeline of the policy formation will be identified, as an interaction between the community and policy makers will probably be influenced by external factors.

6. Results

6.1 What has changed in the Dutch foreign water agenda?

To understand the influence of epistemic communities on the formation of the Dutch foreign water agenda, it is important to first discover what changed occurred at what time and why, within the time frame of this investigation. To do this, the following chapter will describe the state of the Dutch foreign water agenda before 1999 as a starting point, followed by a description of the most important changes in the policy per five-year period. The changes will include national policy and regional water authority policy.

6.1.2 Before 1999

The Dutch foreign water policy before the year 1999 was virtually non-existent. The national government did not mention international water action, nor had any human or financial resources available. This does not mean that nothing happened: the Dutch ministry of development assistance, as well as SNV, the Dutch development cooperation, performed projects in sanitation and water management, like providing water filters and digging wells (Hinfelaar 2011: IOB Evaluaties 2008). Even though water projects were performed occasionally, an overall sector strategy and clear policy goals lacked (Brinkman 2010: Spitz et al 2013). Before 1999, the only mentioning of something related to a foreign water agenda in government agreements was the commitment to improving drink water provision through development cooperation, as one of many goals in development countries (Rijksoverheid 1998).

For the regional water authorities, more or less the same applies. In the 90's separate water authorities started development projects abroad on their own initiative for philanthropic aims. The nature of these projects remained small and had started without any national coordination or set overall policy goals. The projects were not coordinated with other Dutch actors, like companies or ministries (UvW 2010a).

6.1.2 1999 – 2004: The first steps towards coordination and development cooperation

The period of 1999 – 2004 is when the first developments considering a foreign water agenda started in the Netherlands. The national government and private sector set some first exploring steps, while more concrete plans were made by the water authorities.

The national government and the private water sector have set up the Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP) in 1999, which is an important step towards integration of public and private efforts in the Dutch international water efforts. One of the important reasons for setting up NWP, as explained on their own website: <https://www.netherlandswaterpartnership.com/>, is that the Dutch notice that they lack behind in sectoral integration at the World Water Forum (WWF). WWF is the annual worldwide forum for knowledge sharing and ambition development on global water issues (Cosgrove and Rijsberman 2014). NWP would be a platform for different public and private actors working in the water sector with ambitions to work abroad. NWP's goal would be to increase the Dutch water sector's "international impact". This international impact meant increasing global water security, sanitation availability, and sustainable water management. The purpose, however, cannot be only seen as being purely altruistic: the international impact is to be increased through private sector involvement, selling their services and technologies to foreign actors at commercial prices. This partnership nowadays consists out of 181 organisations in the Dutch water sector, including universities, knowledge institutes, NGO's, large and small companies and all sorts of government organisations. The added value of this platform can be found in information distribution throughout the sector, coordinating foreign missions, international network sharing, reducing barriers for consortium forming, and to act as the contact point for foreign actors seeking cooperation with the Dutch water sector. It is even used

for private sector and NGO feedback on the government in terms of the foreign water agenda, according to their own website: <https://www.netherlandswaterpartnership.com/>.

Parallel to the government's initiative to establish the NWP, a major project called Partners for Water (PvW) was set up. PvW was an initiative to integrate all public efforts in the Dutch water sector working abroad, like water authorities, ministries and Rijkswaterstaat (RWS). Rijkswaterstaat is the Dutch technical government organisation responsible for water management and infrastructural projects throughout the country, which was chosen to lead NWP responsible organisation. Over a hundred water projects have been executed between 2000 and 2004 by PvW, with an annual budget of €30, financed by the Ministry of Development Cooperation. This Dutch fund would often finance initial research about possibilities and requirements, after which it suggested which Dutch companies could contribute to solving these problems (Rijkswaterstaat 2004).

A more development focussed change occurred in 2000 with the UN and Dutch adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's): eight goals for the world to have reached by 2015 considering global welfare and wellbeing. Water and sanitation are mentioned as part of millennium goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability, while multiple other goals can indirectly be linked to water management as well, as explained on the UN MDG website: <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. By committing itself to the millennium goals, the Netherlands also committed to steer international efforts towards "better" water management, even though specific mentioning and action by the national government in this field had to wait a few years. Until 2004, these goals were not mentioned in any government coalition agreement. In 2003, the short mentioning of the MDG mostly focussed on the aims to make use of public-private partnerships to reach the goals (Rijksoverheid 2002: Rijksoverheid 2003).

The year 2000 was also important for the water authorities, as in this year, they presented their first international affairs brief, which marked the change from small, uncoordinated international actions by individual authorities towards more coordination, guided by the newly established Dutch Water Authorities (DWA). The DWA was the new overarching body for the previously introduced regional water authorities. International efforts were also to be coordinated with the NWP, hence were to include the entire Dutch golden triangle: the public, private and academic/research sectors (UvW 2005).

Overall, the period 1999 – 2004 is the period laying the foundations for, and sometimes already executing a Dutch foreign water agenda. Increased cooperation was initiated through the NWP and the first international affairs brief of the water authorities. At the same time, the MDG's were developed by the UN, and to contribute to these, more public-private cooperation was the envisioned tool.

6.1.3 2005 – 2009: increasing both private sector involvement and philanthropy efforts

After the initial phase of 1999-2004 in which the outlines of a first foreign water agenda started to form, the second phase sees the increased involvement of the private sector, while paradoxically increasing the focus on the MDG's.

After having launched the first international water brief in 2000, the DWA launched a second one in 2005. This one is more elaborate and concrete than the first one, as it mentions more specific goals and goes further than just calling for increased coordination. The goal of the 2005-2009 was to focus on cooperation on policy and institutional issues related to decentralised water management, as well as on knowledge creation and exchange. Through cooperation with the NWP, the DWA aims to support the Dutch (private) water sector internationally through sharing expertise and facilitating their

contribution to projects, through for example increased participation in water forums, and water authorities' personnel can be hired as consultants by Dutch companies. Cooperation with Dutch knowledge institutes will be intensified and an overall strategy to this end will be developed. The DWA will support the private sector in reaching common goals, without a financial motive of the water authorities themselves. Conditions are that the knowledge or expertise provided should be related to the official responsibilities of the water authorities, and that the project should contribute to sustainable development of the recipient country or region (UvW 2010a).

2005 Also marked the beginning of the second PvW program. After having performed many different projects coordinated by the public sector, the policy from 2005 onwards was to broaden its member group, allowing private actors and NGO's to join as well. This was to strengthen the position of the broader Dutch water sector abroad, combining the strengths of all actors. In this way, The Dutch international competition position should increase, and global water issues can be solved more effectively. To this end, the responsibility for PvW was given out of the hands from RWS, into those of NWP (PvW 2009: Teisman 2012).

In the 2006 coalition agreement, water is mentioned in relation to increasing the competitive water sector of the Netherlands on the international market, aiming at the parallel process of public sector development and development aid for sustainable products, focussed on innovation (Rijksoverheid 2006). At the same time, 2006 saw the birth of an important tool for the water authorities. The Dutch Water Authorities Bank, a bank used to finance Dutch domestic water projects, set up an additional fund: The Dutch Water Authorities Bank Fund. This fund was established to give water authorities more ability to perform international projects. The aim of this fund is to provide loans to finance the international ambitions of the authorities, to make them less reliant on external financiers for executing their social responsibility (Havekes and Dekking 2014).

In 2007, the Schokland agreement was signed by many different Dutch entities. This agreement asks for active commitment of the signees towards reaching the MDG's. Amongst the entities signing were public entities, including water authorities, municipalities, as well as private sector and NGO's. The agreement was not only to commit participation to the goals on paper, but also to guarantee government as well as private sector funding and non-financial contributions (Koch 2007). In the same year, the Dutch minister for development cooperation praised the active contribution of the water authorities to the MDG's, while not mentioning anything about the Dutch self-interests (UvW 2007). In 2008, DWA takes extra measures to stick with the Schokland agreement by setting up extra aid tools, like cultural sensitivity workshops to stimulate water authorities' contribution to the MDG's (UvW 2008). The water authorities were also more present at the WWF in 2009, seeing an important role for themselves towards reaching the MDG's (UvW 2009a). In the same year, it is even mentioned that they started supporting the Dutch military in infrastructure projects during the peace mission in Afghanistan (UvW 2009b).

A first shift towards the 2010-2014 period already starts in 2009 though, with the Dutch construction sector actively lobbying at the water authorities for more cooperation. They think that by working together, the Netherlands could gain a better competitive position, increasing Dutch economic gains through more close cooperation (UvW 2009c).

What strikes in the 2005-2009 period is that both the private sector and development goals of the water agenda, become increasingly important. The water authorities increase cooperation with and services provided to the private sector, and the PvW tool falls into partially private hands. The water authorities' aid to the private sector should always benefit the guest country though, and the

authorities have increased their financial self-reliance. Through the Schokland agreement, the national government increases the efforts for the MDG.

6.1.4 2010 - 2014: Towards an economic diplomacy agenda

We branded the 1999-2004 period as first-steps development for integration and the setup of a plan for a foreign water agenda, and 2005-2009 as a dual focus period of the Dutch foreign water agenda on both self-interest as well as development goals. The 2010-2014 period marks the period of the focus on economic diplomacy and pursuit of self-interest, with the development aspect as a by-product.

Still in the spirit of the previous chapter though, the international policy document of the Dutch water authorities released in 2010 is largely a continuation of previously made policy. Though the focus has shifted towards more cooperation with other actors. The vision is to participate in partnerships with the idea that actors with varying expertise can contribute to their strengths. This would open up larger projects, and financing might be made easier to find. The ministries of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation and Infrastructure and Water Management are named as specific partners (UvW 2010a).

The national coalition agreement of 2010 states that 'within the development cooperation budget, a strong expansion in the possibilities for the private sector will take place' (8), of which water management is one of the key subjects. This agreement is the first one to name another ministry in relation to the foreign water agenda: The Ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Innovation, who will focus on the Dutch economic competition position through export promotion. At the same time, water authorities are summoned to limit their work to their main tasks (Rijksoverheid 2010a). An important change in development cooperation does occur, as can be read from the Prime Minister's own statement:

'the development budget will be largely maintained, but the spending of it will be changed profoundly [...] we increasingly focus on self-sufficiency and on more space for the private sector. Development aid will also link more with themes that the Netherlands is good at, like water and agriculture. The Netherlands will keep contributing to reaching the Millennium Goals.' (Rijksoverheid 2010b).

This national policy really took shape with the implementation of the top sector policy in 2011. This policy aims to stimulate private sector development and cooperation in nine defined top sectors to stimulate the Dutch global economic competition, hence Dutch welfare, as well as that of recipient countries. The eventual goals with the top sector policy are:

1. 'The Netherlands in the top 5 of knowledge economies in the world (by 2020)
2. Increase of the Dutch R&D-efforts to 2.5% of the GDP (by 2020)
3. Top consortiums for knowledge and innovation in which public and private parties participate for more than €500 million of which at least 40% financed by the private sector (in 2015)'

(Rijksoverheid 2011, 3)

The new policy's main change is that it 'aims to steer less through rules and subsidies, but provides Dutch companies the space to do business, invest, innovate and export.' (Rijksoverheid 2011, 3) Key point of the top sector approach is the notion that issues and chances can be dealt with more effectively with proper coordination in the golden triangle.

The internationalisation of the top sector approach is based on 5 pillars:

- Positioning the Dutch private sector internationally,
- Through active support of international companies,
- Establishing equal playing grounds for entrepreneurs,

- Attract foreign top companies and secure their presence,
- And apply Dutch strengths for development cooperation.

The last point also includes reserving development cooperation funds for the top sector approach, of which €30 million per year for public private partnerships for the water sector (Rijksoverheid 2011)

Through this policy, the national government aims to integrate the golden triangles of each of these sectors, reduce laws that hold the sectors back, increase investments and train new potential employees in these sectors. To shape the exact policy and its tools, a “top team” of experts for each sector has been appointed by the government to provide the government concrete recommendations (topteam water 2011).

In 2013, the new development policy: Aid and Trade, was adopted by the Dutch government. This policy, as previously described, aims to combine aid and trade efforts, with the idea that involving private actors makes aid more efficient and less money consuming, and at the same time will generate a more sustainable relationship ensuring long term economic growth. Considering the water sector, the Aid and Trade agenda stimulates the government to introduce Dutch companies to low and middle-income countries to offer solutions for their water issues. Specific action is taken by setting up the Disaster Risk Reduction teams: teams of Dutch water experts, including from private actors (topteam water 2011). These teams aim to make a quick scan of a country and their potential water risks, after which they propose preliminary solutions, without forgetting to recommend which Dutch companies can offer these solutions. These missions are paid for by the Dutch government, as can be seen on the official website of these projects: <https://aiddata.rvo.nl/programmes/NL-KVK-27378529-25588/?tab=activities>.

As described, this period has shifted the focus to economic diplomacy: the Dutch water sector, including government actors and the water authorities are to set their efforts towards increasing economic opportunities for the private water sector. The development goals have taken a distant second place.

6.1.5 Overall trend

Through the period 1999-2014, the Netherlands has developed its foreign water policy from uncoordinated, independent projects from different actors, to an integrated, sector-approached economic diplomacy agenda. Before 1999, all actors of the Dutch water sector were more or less, free to shape their foreign activities and policy. Between 1999 and 2004, the integration the golden triangle of the water sector began. The years 2005-2009 saw a dual track of the Dutch foreign water agenda, focussing both on self-interest as on countering global water issues. This dual track largely ended by 2010-2014, when aid was still mentioned as goal, but seemed to be subordinate to trade and self-interest. At the end of this period, the water authorities had to comply with nationally determined goals, of a sectoral, economic diplomacy focus, even for their development efforts. The sectoral aspect went beyond integration: the sector received increased government attention as being marked as one of the Netherlands most potential economic sectors. National platforms to unite the water sector’s golden triangle were set up and armed with budget and direct political influence. These platforms increased coordination, and, often together with embassies and government officials, stimulated a wide variety of actors to act abroad through public financial funds.

6.2 How did epistemic communities influenced these changes?

Where the previous sub-chapter mapped the changes that occurred in the Dutch foreign water policy, this chapter aims to understand the ideas and epistemic communities leading to these changes. The

described trend of Dutch foreign water efforts, from an unorganised, non-priority sector, towards a coordinated sector focussing on economic diplomacy, is based on two main arguments:

- The water sector can achieve more when working together
- Development assistance benefits from a liberal approach

With these two ideas being used as the main arguments for the development of the Dutch foreign water agenda to what it is today, these ideas should be focussed upon when assessing potential epistemic communities around these ideas.

6.2.1 The water sector can achieve more when working together

In 1999, the Dutch water sector was not integrated in terms of involved actors yet, but the process of integration was familiar around that time for everyone working in the Dutch water sector, thanks to the development of the concept of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). For water managers, IWRM is defined as: ‘a process which promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.’ (GWP 2000, 22). Even though this concept has already been around since the 1960’s, it re-emerged in the 90’s. Key aspect of IWRM is the integration of different aspects, like hydrology, agronomy and sociology, and thereby the integration of different specialists in water management. In the 90’s IWRM became increasingly popular in dealing with Dutch domestic water issues: the population density was high, citizen rights were strong , andh much of the land was already in used, requiring a careful and inclusive approach for the execution of projects. The new project to reduce river floods in the 90’s, required an approach taking different actors and perspectives into account during the project planning and execution, as well as for the anticipation of potential side-effects of water management for other sectors. At the same time, the project’s size demanded cooperation of many different knowledge and technology possessing actors, including private companies and research institutions, to succeed (RWS unknown).

Realising the need for appropriate water management early on, the Dutch government stimulated IWRM research and implementation early on. Interaction between ministries and different universities made that IWRM became a university subject from 1993 onwards, increasing integrational ideas throughout the sector (Mostert 2006). As can be seen in figure 1, “integrated water” as terms in water management reports, books and articles titles are peaking before the sectoral integration of the Dutch foreign water sector.

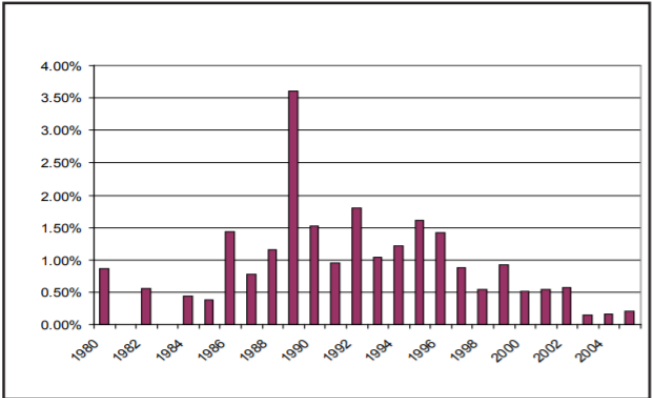


Figure 1: Percentage of Dutch water management reports, books and articles with 'integrated water' in the title. (Mostert 2006)

It is therefore argued that integration in water management projects led to a community of water managers amongst all parties involved in water management that were familiar with the importance of integration. This community would have considered actor integration as a logical direction in terms of sectoral development, after having focussed for several years on IWRM. At the same time, increased international demand for integrated approaches lead to increased need for cooperation between specialised Dutch actors (Cloin 1999). The water authorities can be considered to have been on the

forefront of this development, as they are the prime institutions responsible for Dutch water management, and already were performing international projects.

In the 1990's, IWRM was already seen as a requirement, without raising the question whether it was necessary, but the focus laid at how to implement it. In 1995, the water authorities, claim that more societal integration, with societal and public entities (UvW 1995a), but also knowledge platforms is required (UvW 1995b). Further discussion in the 90's is mostly about the technical tools for implementation, not about the question whether it is worth it (UvW 1995c). The private sector, however, is not mentioned anywhere yet in the 90's as important actor.

The Dutch water sector, with the water authorities on the forefront, can be considered to be an epistemic community, with the episteme being the value of integration in water management. Drawing on the four conditions for an epistemic community, as described by Haas, the Dutch water sector, with a focus on the water authorities: 1) Share the normative and principled beliefs, and 3) have shared notions of validity for weighing and validating knowledge, which are based on the water law, and its predecessors (Rijksoverheid 2008). This water law and its predecessors provide the norms and responsibilities of actors involved in Dutch Water management. The water authorities also 2) share causal believes, for example that actor integration of the sector is beneficial for water management. Lastly, they 4) have a common policy enterprise to which their competence is directed to serve human welfare.

Even though this last point can be debated, as water authorities are officially political entities, and therefore could be expected to act out of self-interest, practice seems to be different. Even though their boards are partly chosen by public elections, the election process is remarkable a-political: differences between parties are very small, public involvement is almost non-existent (Boogers and Tops 2000) and their responsibilities have already been clearly defined by the previously mentioned water law and its predecessors. The water authorities are often considered to be technocratic bodies (De Graaff et al 2009).

The "integration epistemic community", did not only comprise of the water authorities though, as can be seen at the beginning of our previously explored timeline. The year 1999 was a turning point in the Dutch foreign water agenda, as this year witnessed the birth of an important platform for the Dutch foreign water efforts: NWP. The main reason for NWP to be set up, was that the Dutch water sector noticed that they lacked behind in national cooperation compared to other countries. As briefly mentioned before, they painfully recognised this at the first WWF in 1997: Even though many different Dutch actors were present at the forum, they were not aware of each other's presence, giving away many opportunities to more cooperative countries. That the Netherlands has always seen itself as water country, but not a single Dutchman was chosen for the board of the World Water Council, painfully showed how the Netherlands was lacking behind in sector coordination (Luchtenbelt 2016).

As indicated earlier, NWP was an important step towards integration of the water sector, but it also played a vital role in the epistemic community. The importance of integration was clearly visible through NWP, as they took the coordination role of the 2nd WWF on them, which saw a far greater coordination and success for the Dutch (UvW 2000a). The need for integration was also visible in the fact that Aquatech 2000, a fair in Amsterdam for water technologies, often visited by a lot of small, niche technology companies, had the theme: integral water (UvW 2000b). In 2003, a large water authorities workshop, with representatives from each authority, concludes that more coordination between the authorities is required (UvW 2003). In 2005, the director of NWP noted that some parts of the water sector were way more successful in international efforts than others. He named large dredging and engineering companies as successful, while smaller, sanitation and water treatment

companies lacked the international networks and are offering small solutions, instead of the requested integral solution. Cooperation throughout the sector would allow it to offer the whole package (Velzen 2005). This director, with a professional background in integral water management for a large Dutch engineering company dwelled on his personal experiences in reflecting on other branches of the Dutch water sector, according to his own LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jeroenvandersommen/>. Through integration, the quality delivered by the Dutch water sector could be improved, leading to an increased competition position, but also to improved water management. In 2006, NWP mentions that the Netherlands, despite its expertise, is not materialising its economic potential in the international water sector thanks to its fragmentation (UvW 2006a).

Summarising, it is argued that the Dutch water sector, mainly guided by the water authorities, were formed into an epistemic community around the episteme of the importance of integration. Even though they are not the most classical kind of epistemic community, their actual believe in the importance of integration, and lack of self-interest arguments, allow them to be seen as an epistemic community fighting for the “human welfare” considering water management. The episteme itself developed from the notion of the importance of the integration of different fields of science in water management, which in a practical form would often mean the integration of different actors in water management projects. This requirement became even more clear when the Dutch water sector noticed that they started falling behind with other countries. Altogether, this provides clear arguments why the integration of the Dutch sector was a priority, which is one of the main reasons for the formation of an integrated Dutch foreign water policy.

6.2.2 The efficiency of development aid through the liberal approach

If the previous sub-chapter explains the need and therefor action to form a Dutch foreign water policy, the reason for why it developed in a liberal, economic diplomacy focussed agenda remains unexplained, hence will be covered in this sub-chapter. Of course, the self-interest aspect considering the economic diplomacy focussed policy is obvious and requires little explanation: making more money as a country is often seen as a government goal itself. Another, often heard argument though, is that the combination of aid and trade is one of the best ways to stimulate economic development in the partner country. This sub-chapter will investigate the epistemic community around this notion.

The shift that we have witnessed for the Dutch water sector is a heavy dependence on liberal aid. The idea behind liberal aid is that increase in trade and first world companies’ presence in development countries is beneficial for the latter’s economic development, can be linked directly to the idea of economic diplomacy (Packenham 2015). This focus shift during the span of this research is visible in the increased importance of the golden triangle in reaching the millennium goals, but also in the current aid and trade agenda.

This focus has not always been like this though. As previously mentioned, Hoebink (2006) points out to us that the focus of Dutch development aid has shifted back and forth between the preacher and the merchant, finishing with a dominance of the preacher during his writing. Historically, the Netherlands is one of the countries contributing heavily to development aid. Between 1975 and 2013, the Netherlands, as one of few countries, stuck to the UN agreement that all developed countries should contribute 0.7% of their GDP to development aid (Spitz et al 2013). The history of the welfare state, combined with Christian believes of helping the lesser of in this world, have long formed the basis for Dutch development aid (Bremant 2011). At the end of the 1990’s, contrary to the liberal idea, the Netherlands even decided to focus their development efforts towards the recommendations of the World Bank, which pointed out the requirement of good governance as a basic requirement for development, something that does not form with liberal development aid. (Dollar and Pritchett 1998).

Times have changed though in the Dutch development sector. Indications for the attitude change towards aid were already identified in 1998 by Zoomers. She notices that, despite domestic economic growth, the Dutch people seemed to have lost interest in development cooperation. Zoomers speculates that this might be due to the reduction of Christian belief, as Christian values generally find development aid important, as well as to the vast amount of critical reports and evaluations considering development aid. She points out though, that these critical evaluations are mostly a result of an excessive testing and evaluation culture at the responsible ministry. She does not however mention recommending a more liberal approach (Zoomers 1998).

This Dutch focus on evaluation and assessment of the Netherlands is confirmed by the OECD as well, being an independent reviewer of the Dutch policy. They claim that the Netherlands indeed has a strong focus on proving the effectiveness of its policy (OECD 2006). The OECD approved of this attitude, even recommending to further increase this, and to include these evaluation results in policy making as well: a recommendation to which the Dutch government answered positively (OECD 2013).

At the beginning of the formation of the Dutch foreign water agenda, the water authorities did notice that they received a larger role in this agenda. Between 2000 and 2004, increasingly received international attention, but the focus of the water authorities remains unbound development aid and gaining knowledge for their own employees. No national financial motives are named (UvW 2004).

This shifts around 2008, when an external party evaluated the PvW program of the last years. Even though their evaluation covered the entire project, including Dutch economic gains of the program, the availability of finance and the satisfaction of participants, it also focused on the value and impact on development. They conclude that linking the improvement of the international competing position of the Dutch water sector with providing solutions for the global water issues is a double goal that risks leading to tensions during the execution of the program. The report concludes that it is mainly the self-interest component that has been the successful component of the program. The main problems with the development goal through this instrument is that the countries most in need of aid, often do not have the largest economic potential, and they require a more sustainable approach including investment in maintenance and usage of technical solutions, instead of just the selling of projects. Additionally, the focus on delta countries indirectly takes the focus away from the poorest African countries dealing with droughts (Draijer et al 2008).

When asking a range of experts from the development sector about the liberal direction of development policy in 2011, they are often negative. Even PUM, a sub organisation of the largest Dutch employer organisation, which focusses on assisting Dutch companies operating in development countries and upcoming markets, has given an interesting opinion on aid and trade. PUM is positive about the commercial focus, but surprisingly negative about the focus on the Dutch interests of the development policy. When regarding more development orientated organisations, most opinions regard the liberal shift as very negative (Huson 2011).

The Dutch increase focus on mixing development aid and economic interests did not go unnoticed with the OECD either. Just like these experts from development agencies, the OECD also warned the Netherlands for that combining aid and trade would pose a large risk for its development efforts (OECD 2013). They even recommend the Dutch that 'the renewed emphasis on private sector development [i.e. economic development of the receiving country] remains clearly distinguished and separate from the promotion of Dutch commercial interest' (OECD 2013, 12).

One of the few bodies advising the government to take this liberal approach for the Dutch foreign water agenda was the previously introduced top-team water. It must be made clear, however, that the goal of this top-team, has never been to deliver effective development aid. This top-team was

established to advise how best to increase international market opportunities. Even though development cooperation is often mentioned in their advice, it is not their main goal (Topsteam Water 2011). Their orientation towards economy is not only clear from their advice though, but also from the composition of their team: 43% came from private businesses, 28% from the public sector, of which none from the Ministry of Development Cooperation, and only 2% from NGO's. The rest is research and education (20%) and from a combination of backgrounds (8%), based on background checks performed on provided team backgrounds at <http://www.topsectorwater.nl/ledenoverzicht/>. When relating this to Haas' definition of an epistemic community, the self-interest instead of the improvement of human welfare, and the lack of principled believe seems to be lacking, disqualifying it as an epistemic community.

When regarding the difference in opinions of major bodies advising the Dutch government about the approach towards development cooperation, it is hard to find an epistemic community recommending the liberal path. They are either critical towards this approach or recommend it because of self-interest. This does not mean that liberal development aid is bad or does not work per-see: to investigate this has not been the scope of this research, nor would it be fair to make such a simplified statement following this research. It does show that the focus of the Dutch foreign water agenda towards aiding economic development through economic diplomacy, or liberal aid, does not seem to be influenced by any dominant epistemic community.

6.3 How did these epistemic communities interact with the policy makers?

By investigating changes in the formation of a Dutch foreign water agenda, it has been noted that the policy has increased its focus on integrating the golden triangle of the sector and executing more projects abroad for development assistance reasons. Later, this focus changed more and more towards creating economic value for the Dutch sector. The epistemic community for integration of the water sector developed thanks to the increased popularity in the water sector of IWRM. An epistemic community considering liberal development aid seems to not have existed. Now it is time to take the final step to unravel the policy development trajectory considering the Dutch foreign water agenda: How did the identified epistemic community and the politicians interact?

At first, politicians and their policy seems to have taken over the recommendations of the water sector considering integration. Different government initiatives were set up for integration of the water sector, on the initiative of different ministries, RWS, and the water authorities. Influence of the water sector and water authorities on politicians was given shape through an array of methods: speaking in front of the parliament, official advice letters and direct conversations with politicians and parties (Smit 2006). Eventually, main political and state figures even started to contribute towards the international image of the water sector to present it like an integrated unit, like the crown prince and state secretaries at the WWF (UvW 2006b, UvW 2009a). The politicians accepting the need for integration was also visible with the actions of the minister of development cooperation in 2007. She set up the Schokland agreement to increase the involvement and cooperation of all sorts of societal actors, including the water sector, to contribute towards reaching the MDG's (Koch 2007).

An important shift in the relations between the community and politicians shows up though when the national policy starts focussing more on economic diplomacy. While at first, the community seemed to be successful in convincing politicians to turn their episteme into policy, this started to change around 2010. In this year, the political direction shifted from focussing on integration towards supporting the private sector. To understand why this happened, it is important to understand the circumstances of that time.

In 2008, the global financial crisis started with the collapse of the Lehman brothers in the US, with severe economic consequences for the Netherlands as well. The Dutch government responded to this worst crisis since the 30's by large budget cuts and public management and bureaucracy reduction (Vis et al 2011). The impact on the water authorities can be seen directly by comparing the political programs of the elections before and during the crisis. In 2006, when nobody suspected a crisis yet, only one national party wanted to dissolve the water authorities as separate government bodies (UvW 2006c). In 2010, 6 parties wanted to either abolish them or merge them with the provinces for budget and bureaucracy reduction (UvW 2010b). The water authorities, from being a broadly accepted advisory body to politics, now had to prove their worth to these politicians. Given the need for budget cuts, the water authorities were forced to change the perceived balance of their added value versus their economic costs. (UvW 2010c). Increasing their value was done through 'putting themselves at the service [...] co-governments, but also increasingly political parties, societal organisations, lobby groups and, last but not least, the private sector. If they get to know us better, more recognition and acknowledgement will, without doubt, follow.' (UvW 2011a).

Later in 2011, budget cuts on water authorities, as well as their international efforts, are named in the same article as where the Dutch water authorities, for the first time, actively name international cooperation together with economic opportunities for the Dutch private sector. In this interview, the question is raised whether this would not create tension between the development cooperation and commercial interests. This question is not answered (UvW 2011b). In the same period, it was also noted by the OECD that the Dutch public opinion towards development assistance is increasingly sceptical about 'the impact and effectiveness of development co-operation, particularly the government-to-government kind.' (OECD 2013, 13). The head of DWA even indirectly admitted in an interview that many of the foreign efforts of the water authorities were performed to prove their value to politicians for institutional survival. Not only did the water authorities change their role, they even took over responsibilities of the national government. This was not done to improve efficiency or to make the authorities more important, but solely because it would reduce the expenditures on the national budget, levying these costs to the water authorities' budgets. This reflects the pressure on the authorities of the time (Kuijpers 2016). In 2012, the water authorities mainly regarded cooperation between with private sector as an opportunity to prove the value of the water authorities in the eyes the liberal government (UvW 2012a).

In preparation of the next elections, the strategy seems to have paid off: only two parties wanted to merge the water authorities with provinces or larger regions, three parties are actively supporting their continued existence, and the others do not name them (UvW 2012b). After these elections, government support seems to have increased, but at the same time the responsible minister warns that the authorities should not let their guard down and keep working on their public image and societal value (UvW 2013a). Creating economic opportunities for the Dutch sector are named as a potential tool (UvW 2013b), and at the same time politicians call for an integration of the authorities in the aid and trade agenda (UvW 2014).

It seems, from this analysis, that an interesting shift occurred in the interaction of the epistemic community and politicians. At first, politicians listened to the advice on how to address water management, while later, in times of economic crisis, the value of this epistemic community was questioned. This forced the community to, instead of proposing policy, reshape themselves and their activities towards what politicians wanted. What used to be an independent advisory body, had to become a pleaser of the politicians to survive. Because the political parties in power were mainly liberal ones, presenting themselves as protagonists for the private sector (Emerce 2012), the pleasing would have to be of a liberal nature as well.

7. Conclusion

This research opted to investigate the role of epistemic communities on the formation of the Dutch foreign water agenda during 1999-2014. To unravel this, three sub research questions had to be answered:

- What changed exactly in the Dutch foreign water agenda considering involved organisations, methods, goals, and arguments during 1999-2014?
- What epistemic communities formed considering the ideas behind these major identified changes?
- How did these epistemic communities interact with the policy makers?

This research has been performed through the analytical framework of “epistemic communities”, as developed by Haas in the early 1990’s. An epistemic community is defined as a community of experts that has formed around the promotion of an idea or episteme. The group should share a set of normative beliefs, causal beliefs, a notion of validity and a have common policy enterprise to be branded an epistemic community. Such a community can play a vital role advising role to politicians in the policy development process.

Few research about the development of the Dutch foreign water agenda has been performed yet, even though it forms a substantial part of the Dutch foreign policy. Economic diplomacy, the key aspect of the contemporary Dutch foreign water agenda, has been investigated more intensively, but mostly focussing on global or national trends. What lacks for now is analyses of the domestic debate between experts and policy makers, which is what this research aims to do through the analysis of policy documents opinion pieces and professional literature.

The start of this research was to identify what has changed considering the foreign water policy during the researched period. It was found that several notable changes had occurred considering the organisations, methods and goals of the Dutch foreign water policy.

Firstly, the Dutch water sector started a process of integration of involved actors. prior to 1999, projects and companies had generally been small and scattered, without overarching policy nor coordination. The Dutch water authorities started to coordinate their foreign efforts more through the DWA, which set more coherent policy goals. At the same time, the Dutch water sector formed their outward presentation through NWP, initially with the goal to increase the global impact on reaching the MDG’s, while promoting commercial opportunities for the Dutch water sector.

Secondly, around 2010, the focus shifted towards a more economic focus. Especially development aid was to increasingly fulfil a role in stimulating Dutch private sector involvement in development countries. Different funds were set up, and the water authorities were supposed to work more closely together with the private sector. Eventually, the water authorities were expected to support the private sector, presenting themselves as unbiased government professionals, while recommending Dutch companies to come in and solve the problems.

The main ideas behind these changes were twofold: 1) The Dutch water sector should integrate to increase its impact and efficiency, and 2) liberal development aid is more efficient than unbound aid. The epistemic communities behind these ideas have been investigated with the following result:

Integration of the Dutch water sector was stimulated by an epistemic community lead by the Dutch water authorities, based on a preceding episteme. In the 1990’s the Netherlands saw an increase focus on IWRM, a concept stimulating involving different knowledge fields and actors in water projects, because the water sector influences other economic sectors, while simultaneously being influenced

itself by other socio-economic factors. From 1995 onwards, IWRM was completely accepted as a concept by the Dutch water sector. This research argues that the new generation of water managers, believing in the interconnectedness with other sectors and actors, was followed by the idea that the water sector itself should become more integrated as well: If agricultural practices influence water quality, and water quality influences drinkable water availability for a village, it makes sense to include not just water managers, but also agronomists and citizen representatives in water project development process.

The second idea, that liberal aid is more successful as a development aid tool than unbound aid, on the contrary, does not seem to have been promoted by any epistemic communities. Research about this subject has been performed, but a conclusive consensus has been far from reached. At the end of the 90's, the government even decided to focus on good governance, without much private sector influence, for its development efforts. Most advice for the government even warned for the risks of linking economic self-interest with development aid. It seems that most bodies advising a liberal approach were lobbies from companies, giving them self-interest in the matter, excluding them from being an epistemic community.

The interaction between the epistemic community formed around integration of the water sector took off positively for the epistemic community. In 1999 and the following years, through advisory letters and conversations at ministries and parliament, the suggestion to increase the integration of the sector was warmly accepted. The government acted by setting up platforms of cooperation for the golden triangle in the water sector, as well as by making funds available for larger international projects and consortia. High ranking government officials, including the crown prince, were even deployed for presenting the integrated water sector abroad.

This interaction changed with the commence the economic crisis in 2008, aided by a more negative public opinion about development aid, changing political opinions about the epistemic community. In 2010, many political parties favoured the abolishment of the water authorities to save money. With much lobbying and putting themselves at service of what the liberal politicians of the time wanted, this fate was eventually prevented. Putting themselves at the service of the liberal politicians meant several things: national government tasks were taken over by the water authorities, and, more importantly, the water authorities had to prove their economic value. This economic value was found in supporting the newly founded top sector water in presenting the Dutch water sector abroad and aiding the Dutch private water sector in getting jobs abroad. This new shift seems to have saved the water authorities, but at the cost of the water authorities now acting as economic diplomats for the Dutch water sector.

The main research question that this researched aimed to answer was: What was the role of epistemic communities in the development of the major policy change of the Dutch foreign water policy during 1999-2014? The answer can be briefly put as following:

The integration epistemic community proved to be successful in convincing government actors to integrate the Dutch water sector for international efforts. Through direct lines between the epistemic community and the government, this idea became reality. Around 2010 though, the focus started to shift towards a more economic diplomacy focus: development cooperation became of second importance, and the support of the Dutch private sector became priority. No epistemic community can be given the credit for this development. On the contrary, this development has seen the conversion of the previously mentioned epistemic community promoting integration into a tool at the disposal of economic goals. The economic crisis, public opinion and private sector lobbying seems to have had the upper hand in this process instead of widely accepted episteme.

Especially this last aspect is interesting and different from most research considering epistemic communities. While most of this research identifies how the eventual policy was shaped by epistemic communities, this research about this same communities shows: 1) that epistemic communities can be overruled by other influences on policy making, like external economic developments, lobbying and international developments, and 2) that epistemic community – policy makers interaction is not always a one directional process: the epistemic community might influence policy, but policy makers can also influence the epistemic community. This means that epistemic communities should maybe be considered as one of the many actors partaking in the policy arena, instead of only focussing on their influence on a certain policy.

Some critical remarks can be made about this research and its conclusions though: This research has been performed through analysing written documents. Written sources often do not focus on the aspects most relevant for the epistemic community approach, so the desired information can be hard to find in these documents. Also, the actual negotiation process is hard to find in written sources, as these actions are often not documented or published openly. A suggestion for further or comparable research would therefor be to include interviews with the people involved or experts of the subject to discover the undocumented happenings as well.

Further suggested research could focus on three aspects. Firstly, most research considering epistemic community focusses on a one-way direction of influence. In the case of this research though, a two-way direction occurred. Is this an exception, or is reality somewhat more complex than previous research considering epistemic communities imply? Secondly, more research could be done in other factors of influence on the development of the Dutch foreign water agenda. Investigating policy development with only a focus on epistemic communities inherently marginalises the concluded role of other factors of importance: what was the role of the private sector lobby? Did personal beliefs of politicians have an influence? What role did foreign powers play in the policy change? These and many other factors influencing the formation of the Dutch foreign water agenda can be further investigated to create a more complete picture in the policy formation process. Lastly, did other countries form a comparable, sector based foreign policy? How did this come about, and what were in the factors of influence on these cases? This kind of research would allow this thesis to be placed in a larger perspective, potentially discovering or disproving trends in the role that episteme's play in the development of democratic policy, or maybe even conclude that Dutch transparency in public policy formation is not what we think it is.

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