

**Justification of Dutch Education Policy:**

**A Discursive Institutional Analysis of Dutch Education Policy**

**Debates on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship**

**Education**

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# **Justification of Dutch Education Policy: A Discursive Institutional Analysis of Dutch Education Policy Debates on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education**

## **Abstract**

The Netherlands has a unique education system, characterized by the constitutional right of freedom of education. This uniqueness has consequences for the educational policy making, as evidenced by the differences in the justification of education policy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Citizenship Education (CE). Understanding the justification of education policy contributes to understanding curriculum development as a complex and multi-layered practice, which is relevant for both Dutch stakeholders in current and future curriculum development and understanding the local implementation of solutions to global challenges. This thesis aimed to understand why there are differences in the justification of Dutch government policy on ESD and CE. It does so using the theoretical framework of Discursive Institutionalism. This framework is first applied in the form of a literature review of the Dutch educational policy history, and subsequently in a discursive analysis of Dutch parliamentary debates on ESD and CE. It finds that the differences in justification of policy can be explained by firstly the different historical origins of ESD and CE policy, which resulted in a clearer place for CE in the political debate, and in ambiguous use of terminology and responsibility for ESD. Secondly, the different politization of the topics results in broader political support for CE as opposed to a more polarizing view on ESD. These findings imply that the justification of education policy is influenced minimally by the political discourse itself. Future research could explore the impact of these historical and political factors on education policy more deeply.

Keywords: discursive institutionalism; education for sustainable development; citizenship education, education policy

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## Introduction

Like many countries in the world, the Netherlands faces two crises of arguably existential nature: a climate change crisis, and a crisis of democracy. The former is exemplified by increasingly alarming IPCC reports, more extreme weather and, especially for the Netherlands, a rising sea level (IPCC 2021, KNMI 2021). The latter is characterized by low voter turnouts, low trust in government, and increasing polarization (CBS 2021, Landemore 2020, International IDEA 2022). These issues are recognized globally, and countries have made international commitments aiming to work on these issues, which include commitments explicitly linking global challenges to education (e.g. UNECE 2005, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016). This thesis focuses on two particular commitments: the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)<sup>1</sup>, and the implementation of Citizenship Education (CE)<sup>2</sup>.

Translating such commitments to education policy is no easy task. The Netherlands faces an extra obstacle compared to most countries however, namely the constitutional right to freedom for education that characterizes the Dutch educational system (Mentink, Vermeulen, and Zoontjes, n.d.). The Dutch government's mandate for curriculum-making is limited to primary and secondary education, which will therefore be the scope of this thesis. In 2022, amidst educational reforms, commitments on ESD and CE are far from realised, as evidenced by reports on the implementation of ESD

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specified otherwise, this thesis used the UNESCO definition of ESD: 'ESD gives learners of all ages the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality' as per the website of UNESCO, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Unless specified otherwise, this thesis uses the Dutch government's definition of CE: education that teaches children the common democratic values of our democratic rule of law, and the social and societal competences necessary for this (as stated on the website of the education inspection, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

and political concerns about CE (Faber et al. 2017, Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2020a)

Both commitments received very different support from the government. CE is characterized by educational policy reforms, whereas ESD is characterised by a hands-off, bottom-up approach (Programmateam DuurzaamDoor and RVO 2021, van Raaij 2018, Jucker et al. 2015, Eidhof 2018). While the need for new policy on CE is justified despite potential infringements on the freedom of education, this freedom is used to justify the lack of more policy on ESD. The difference in the given justification of the policies appears arbitrary and raises questions on what influences the policy making process and its justification. While the topic of citizenship education in politics has been covered in literature (e.g. Eidhof 2018, de Jong 2021, Mattei and Broeks 2016), ESD has seen less attention, especially regarding its place in politics beyond mere policy outcomes. This thesis subsequently asks the question: Why are there differences in the justification of Dutch Government policy on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education?

This question is relevant in understanding the curriculum policy-making process as a complex and multi layered practice, particularly elucidating on how the Netherlands is implementing local solutions to global challenges. Additionally, this understanding is useful for stakeholders in the current and future curriculum policy-making process around ESD and CE. Guiding questions in answering the main questions include: Which key ideas and discourse have shaped Dutch government policy on ESD/CE? What are the differences in the justification for ESD/CE policy? This thesis makes use of Vivian Schmidt's theoretical framework Discursive

Institutionalism (DI) to analyse the political debate surrounding the justification of ESD and CE policy. DI, a newer branch of the neo-institutionalist tradition, places emphasis on the role of ideas and discourse in institutional contexts. It also assumes a more dynamic view of institutional change than other neo-institutionalist approaches (Schmidt 2008).

This thesis consists of four main sections. The first part will elaborate on the conceptualisation of certain terms, as well as on the chosen analytical framework of Discursive Institutionalism (DI) and how it is applied in this thesis. The following section, using DI's conception of ideas and discourse, will then give an overview of how they shaped the Dutch educational context in regard to ESD and CE. The results section will first give elaboration on the debates chosen for the analysis, and then examine the coordinative discourse around recent developments in both fields by conducting a discursive analysis. Finally, these results are discussed before formulating a conclusion.

## **Discursive institutionalism in the Dutch context**

Dutch politics in general, as a consequence of societal pillarization, is characterized by much deliberation (Lijphart 2012). Whether within government, or between government and other political actors such as think-tanks and unions. In particular, the constitutional right for freedom of education has long resisted institutional change, mediating between different ideologies as a normative value that government should not interfere with the 'how and why' of education (Mentink, Vermeulen, and Zoontjes, n.d.). Because of the influence of different factors on policy

development like historical developments, traditions, and its deliberative nature, discursive institutionalism is suited for the analysis, both examining different *levels* of ideas and different *forms* of ideas (Schmidt 2008. p.309).

These *levels* of ideas are policy, programmatic, and philosophical. Policy ideas are the ones proposed by policy makers themselves, whereas programmatic ideas concern the programs that underlie these policies. Philosophical ideas underpin the policies and programs with organizing ideas, values, and ways of knowing (Schmidt, 2008). To illustrate: a politician declaring there needs to be a curriculum reform for one reason or another is a policy idea. How this reform is proposed to be done, is the programmatic idea underlying it. Below that, there are the philosophical ideas, for example the idea that education should reflect the most recent scientific knowledge.

The two *forms* of ideas are cognitive and normative. Cognitive ideas are about how policies offer solutions to the problems at hand, how programs define these problems to be solved and the methods by which to solve them, and how both policies and programs mesh with the deeper core of principles and norms of relevant scientific disciplines or technical practices (Schmidt 2008). Normative ideas speak to how policies meet the aspirations and ideals of the general public and how programs as well as policies resonate with a deeper core of principles and norms of public life (Schmidt 2008). The aforementioned philosophical idea could be categorized as normative or cognitive. If one thinks that education should reflect scientific knowledge because it allows children to understand the world better, this is a cognitive idea. If one believes that it should reflect scientific knowledge because children should know what is right and what is wrong, this is a normative idea.

These ideas are represented in discourse. In the political sphere, DI distinguishes two types of discourse. Firstly coordinative discourse, consisting of individuals and groups at the centre of policy construction, which concerns the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas (Schmidt 2008). Secondly, communicative discourse, consisting of the individuals and groups in the political sphere that present, deliberate, and legitimize political ideas to the general public (Schmidt 2008). Schmidt (2008) puts justification of policy and programmatic ideas under the coordinative discourse in the policy sphere. DI is unique in seeing institutions both as structures that influence a political actor's ability to create and maintain institutions, and as external agents, capable of thinking critically about the institutions in which they operate. This ability of the political actors can be divided into two: their background ideational abilities, and their foreground discursive abilities (Schmidt 2008). Background ideational abilities are the political agents' ability to understand the ideational rules of an institutional setting. Foreground discursive abilities are those that allow a political agent to critically engage with the institutions they are part of and deliberate with themselves and others about institutional rules as they are using them (Schmidt 2008).

Focusing on policymaking as a process of creation, elaboration and justification directs attention to its discursive aspects and how it is possible to think about and act on policymaking at a certain point in time and space (Waldow 2012). To capture these discursive processes, the analytical focus has to be on local policy contexts, where aspects such as timing, impact and process influence this creation, elaboration, and justification (Schmidt 2008). The local policy context that is analysed in this thesis is the Dutch Second Chamber. The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy (as per the



website of the Second Chamber, accessed June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022). The parliament, in name of the citizens, checks the government and make laws together (Second Chamber 2022). The parliament consists of the First and Second Chamber, the latter being voted on democratically in the national elections, and consequently forming a government (Second Chamber 2022). This makes it the logical choice for Dutch policy analysis. To summarize: by focusing on, and distinguishing different types of, ideas and discourse, it analyses local policy contexts. In doing so, DI takes a dynamic approach explaining institutional change. The following section will explain how this approach is used in this thesis.

## **Methodology**

In order to understand the local policy context, and to inform the subsequent discourse analysis, a discursive analysis of the educational context will be done in the form of a historical literature review of Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education in the Netherlands. The chosen time period for the context is 1917-present, using the constitutional amendment of 1917 as the beginning of the current education system in the Netherlands. Academic literature on this subject is sought firstly from 2017 onwards, to include the contemporary perspective; but due to limited coverage on education for sustainable development using contemporary terminology, includes literature from 2011-2017 as well. Academic literature was found using Smartcat and snowball methods, using search terms such as “ESD/CE in the Netherlands”, “Sustainability/citizenship in the curriculum reform”, and “Dutch policy on ESD/CE”, as well as the Dutch translations of such terms. Due to the limited results, all literature with relevant key terms in the title were considered. Additionally, the

reviews are informed by grey literature such as government publications, policy documents and law, found through government and affiliated NGO websites, using the same terms. Both Dutch and English literature was used. The literature review relies primarily on academic accounts of the historic development of citizenship education by de Jong (2018); and of education for sustainable development by Jucker et al. (2015) and Leussink et al. (2019). This is because for CE, de Jong's account is the most recent one that not only goes into the history of the policy, but also what factors influenced this history, and how it influenced today's policy context. For ESD, Jucker et al. is the most recent comprehensive account of the history of ESD policy, while referring to it as ESD (as opposed to sustainability, green education, etc.). Leussink et al. is used extensively because in their account of the development of nature and environment education (the precursor to ESD in the Netherlands), they cover the different contextual factors that are left out by Jucker et al.

The discursive analysis is done by analysing arguments made for or against ESD/CE policy. This analysis looks whether the argument is made on the basis of background ideational abilities, or foreground discursive abilities. For example, is CE policy argued for using the current political context or is argued for because of deliberations about the failings this current political context? Additionally, it examines which policy level the arguments are targeting. For example, are arguments made on the basis of beliefs about the efficiency of the policy or because political actors agree or disagree philosophically with the policy? Mapping the dimensions of the arguments allows this thesis to understand the local policy context and, together with the findings from the literature review, answer the main research question. Transcripts and videos of debates are available online at various government depositories. The timeframe for the

debate analysis is the governmental period of Cabinet Rutte III (26<sup>th</sup> of October 2017-10<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 [demissionary from the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2021]). As of the writing of this thesis, this is the most recent completed governmental period, and decisions therein are reflective of the current political climate. Additionally, older debates do not always have extensive coverage as the digital versions of government publications are only official after the first of July 2009, as noted on the website of the government, accessed June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022). The debates are found through the website of the second chamber. Here, overviews of the progress of a law's implementation can be found, with links to transcripts and videos of the debates. This method was used to find debates on citizenship education and the curriculum reform. The debate concerning education for sustainable development was found through a repository for missed debates, also found on the website of the Tweede Kamer, accessed June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, using the same keywords used in the literature review, excluding English terms. The transcript was later procured through the main website of the second chamber. It must be noted that while an objective analysis of the debates is the goal, the authors positionality might potentially influence the interpretation of the arguments made and their context.

## **Literature review**

The literature review serves to give an insight into which ideas and what discourse influenced the current Dutch educational policy context in regard to CE and ESD. This context is necessary for the reader to better understand the results and discussion. The literature review also informs the same discussion of the results, placing current events in the historical context to gain a better understanding of them. The next

section first covers citizenship education, followed by education for sustainable development.

### ***Key ideas and discourse in Dutch government policy on CE***

This section provides the context necessary to understand the current policy landscape surrounding citizenship education. Current CE policy is shaped by historical ideas concerning the role of citizens and education in society, education reforms, and multiculturalism. As mentioned in the introduction, current educational policy in the Netherlands can be traced back to the constitutional amendment of 1917, which made both public and private education funded equally by the government (Mentink, Vermeulen and Zoontjes, n.d.). This way, the government as a whole could remain politically neutral on education, while allowing different societal pillars to form their own schools and teach children their own ideologies (Mentink, Vermeulen and Zoontjes, n.d.). During and after the Second World War however, fuelled by concerns that the youth had become unknowledgeable and ‘too wild’ after the German occupation, voices from society called for education that explicitly addressed this (for example noted in De Gooi- en Eemlander on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940; or see Righart 1995). Due to the focus on material rebuilding after the war, it took until the 1960s for this desire to make its way into education policy but it has not left it since then (de Jong 2021). Under roman-catholic and social democrat governments, citizen involvement in government became more accepted (de Jong 2021). With this however, the concern also arose that citizens had lost the overview of modern society, which led to new initiatives such as the Foundation for Civic Science, who form part of the coordinative and communicative sphere today (de Jong 2021). Then, in 1968, a law, put forward by the then minister of education, was passed that standardized school types in secondary

education, a system that is mostly intact today, also introducing a course called ‘maatschappijleer’, or sociology, to educate students about the workings of society (de Jong 2021). It had almost full support of the Second Chamber, but there was not yet an idea about what specifically the course should entail (de Jong 2021). This led to a recurring problem that plagues the debate around citizenship education today: what should it be about, and who decides this (de Jong 2021)? This post war period then was characterized by general agreement that citizens should receive more civil education, but the different societal sections and corresponding political factions could not coordinate on how this education should be institutionalized coherently (de Jong 2021). The sixties and seventies were marked by many upcoming social movements, and this was reflected in the political clash around CE, with proponents of the politization of the course arguing against moderates who wanted it to be politically neutral (de Jong 2021). Actors in the communicative discourse such as teachers’ unions, education experts and different political blocks heavily influenced the debate, as did the general public, with students occupying university buildings to demand institutional reform (e.g. Hülsenbeck, Louman, and Oskamp 1970). One committee tasked with making a learning plan had to be absolved before the next one was able to formulate a plan, which was however again very broad (de Jong 2021). A new vision that allowed schools to choose their own approach to CE was developed in 1984, warding off a conclusion to the ideological battle, and the course was also integrated into the final exam (de Jong 2021). In 1998 ‘maatschappijleer’ became a part of two out of four new profiles that made up the second half of secondary education, and from 2007 also its own final exam called ‘societal sciences’ (de Jong 2021). The emphasis on teaching concrete knowledge allowed the subject to integrate itself fully into the educational system, but it meant that the wider debate surrounding citizenship would now have to turn somewhere else.

Programmatic and policy solutions were only able to put into practice when they were sufficiently ideologically neutral. Designed for accommodating many different views, Dutch political institutions did not allow for one idea to dominate the discourse.

The concept of citizenship as more than specific knowledge saw a return in the early 1990s, at the same time that the societal debate surrounding multiculturalism grew in size (de Jong, 2021). The two topics saw an intersection in Islamic schools making more use of the constitutional right to education, and in mandatory integration courses for immigrants (de Jong 2021). Rhetoric also turned against the citizen, who had become too individualistic in the ‘depillarization’ of the 60s and 70s<sup>3</sup>. In order for the welfare state remain affordable, a certain behaviour was expected from citizens, and that the state has a role to play in teaching this behaviour (de Jong 2021). This discourse was carried primarily by different political parties, who, previously divided on this topic, now pointed to increased crime rates as the justification for a need for social norms and values. Since then, a fundamental debate has been going on about whether ‘the fundamental values of liberal democracy’ are sufficiently protected by Western cultures against supposed reactionary cultures such as Islam (de Jong 2021). In 2006 this debate led to another attempt to instil these values in education: Schools received a citizenship mandate, aimed at ‘promoting active citizenship and social integration’ peers (Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden 2005). Apart from that, and the sentence that students have a knowledge of and get familiar with different backgrounds and cultures of their peers (Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden 2005), no

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<sup>3</sup> Pillarization is the division of the populace into different ‘pillars’, representing different groups of people such as Catholics or Socialists. In the Netherlands, these groups usually had their own representation in government as well (Lijphart 2007).

further direction is specified in the law. It soon became clear however that this approach was not sufficient, the primary issues being:

- Schools receive too little direction
- Schools have insufficient oversight on the effectiveness of their education.
- The citizenship mandate is not obligatory enough, which gives the inspection little handholds for enforcement. (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2019)

In 2019, a new proposal was put forward to address these issues. The core of citizenship was to be properly mandatory and lies in the principles and assumptions of the democratic rule of law (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2019). This clarification was aimed at solving the first of the three issues. Secondly, the wording of the law was changed to be more active. Schools were now mandated to develop a vision and plan on citizenship education. This served both to give schools better insight into their efforts and provided a clearer way for the Educational Inspection to do their job (Tweede Kamer 2019). Again, the focus was on concrete knowledge, and politization was carefully avoided in order to stay in line with article 23 of the constitution (Tweede Kamer 2019). After extensive consultations with NGOs, experts and teachers, the law was passed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2021, becoming active on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August in the same year as noted on the website of the educational inspection, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

It appears that the policy surrounding citizenship education was primarily shaped by two things: on the one hand, foreground discourse around ‘existential societal threats’ such as crime rates, immigration, and individualization. On the other hand, debates around the nature of the relationship between citizens and the government. Due to societal pillarization and the institutions designed to deal with his, prevented

foreground discourse from making the institutional change that would allow CE to be explicitly normative until 2006. In any case, cabinets and ministers had a big influence in steering the coordinative discourse to formulate plans for CE, however ineffective they often turned out to be.

### ***Key ideas and discourse in Dutch government policy on ESD***

This section gives the context necessary to understand the current policy landscape surrounding education for sustainable development. Current ESD policy is shaped by historical ideas concerning the role of government and citizens in environmental conservation, international developments, and education reforms. Education for sustainable development in the Netherlands is built upon a much older tradition of Nature and Environment Education (NEE) and can arguably still be counted as part of NEE today. Until the 1960s, the National Foundation for the Protection of Nature, the Dutch National Forest Service and local governments played a key role in providing learning opportunities about nature while raising environmental awareness, which had a focus on nature conservation<sup>4</sup> (de Hamer and de Wolf. 2015). Societal initiatives also saw an increase as a response to urbanization and an increase in free time (Leussink et al. 2019). In the 1960s, this focus shifted towards environmental education, known as NEE. This shift was mainly a result of influential international works and gatherings, as well as the appearance of increasing evidence of environmental pollution in the Netherlands (van der Waal 2011). The education that accompanied this shift was focussed on solving the environmental problems, individually and globally (van der Waal 2011). Policy on environmental protection was very decentralized, with provinces, municipalities and companies having to develop their own environmental plan

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<sup>4</sup> For a discursive analysis of nature conservation policy in the Netherlands, see Buijs, Mattijssen, and Arts (2014).



(Leussink et al. 2019). The educational aspect of such plans was always optional, reflecting the Dutch emphasis on ideas of individual and local responsibility (Leussink et al. 2019). Nature and Environment education were officially joined in the 80's, but different ideas of where the intersections between the two topics were remained in discussion (Leussink et al. 2019). Different ministries were responsible for implementation of the nature side and the environment side and as a consequence of the different revenue streams and organization, a dichotomy between the two topics remained (Leussink et al. 2019). With nature protection organizations focussing more on public and communicative discourse on awareness, and the environmental organizations focussing more on behaviour and influencing the coordinative discourse (Leussink et al. 2019). The 1990s, ESD as a standalone concept became more popular and visible as a result of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, international policy agreements and new forms of governance emphasized the involvement of citizens in envisioning the future and decision-making (van der Waal 2011). In the Netherlands, this meant that local NEE centres took a big role in starting the dialogue to 'act local', and also functioned as coordinative actor towards the government on this front (Leussink et al. 2019). Interesting is that in this time, many other countries incorporated global citizenship education into NEE (Leussink et al. 2019). In the Netherlands however, discourse on global citizenship education was generally competing with NEE discourse for space in the curriculum (Leussink et al. 2019). The broadening of NEE also led to discussion about whether the name was a good reflection of its purpose, but because of different conceptions about both things, both nationally and internationally, no consensus has been reached (Leussink et al. 2019). While internationally, Environmental Education has been transformed to ESD, in the Netherlands, NEE is not always recognized to also mean Learning for Sustainable Development (Leren Voor

Duurzame Ontwikkeling; LVDO). From 2000-2011, NEE and ESD were part of one strategy, but essentially remained separate programmes (de Hamer and de Wolf 2015).

In 2008, the Dutch National Sustainable Development Strategy (KADO) was announced by the ministers of environment and foreign affairs and development cooperation in a letter to parliament (van der Waal 2011). The strategy was inspired by two sustainability reports<sup>5</sup> and was designed as a multi-stakeholder approach (van der Waal 2011). These were the so called “Five O’s”: Government, Research, Education, Entrepreneurs and ‘Bottom up’ (NGOs, social initiatives, citizen groups, etc) (Leussink et al. 2019). This approach shows the limited role government has in both the coordinative and communicative discourse has on ESD.

In 2012, the Dutch government merged LfSD and NEE into one programme, called ‘Duurzaam Door’ (Continuing Sustainably; CS) (de Hamer and de Wolf. 2015). CS brings governments and societal initiatives together (website of CS, accessed June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Learning and cooperation are central in this. They build networks, connect, and share learning experiences with the goal of accelerating sustainable developments (CS 2022) It is an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and it is executed by Netherlands Enterprise Agency (CS 2022). One crosscutting area of CS, ‘Curriculum & Whole school Approach’, concerns ESD specifically and is led by Cooperation Learning for Tomorrow (Leren voor Morgen) (CS 2022). Initiated by CS, Learning for Tomorrow is a platform gathering several networks to work on the

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<sup>5</sup> The SLO published two documents on ESD on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In these documents, ESD is defined as education that enables children: to make their own choices within complex situations where different possibilities and opinions exist; to take a position; to take responsibility for their own behaviour (Remmers 2007, Bron et al. 2009).

implementation of ESD in different aspects of education (CS 2022). Additionally, they communicate good practices in all levels of education (CS 2022). ‘DuurzaamDoor’ also acts as ‘National Focal Point ESD for UNESCO (ESD for 2030) and UNECE (Strategy for ESD) (CS 2022). The programme was extended in 2016 and again in 2020 and is now working on their program period 2021-2024 (CS 2022). CS’s role in the coordinative and communicative sphere is interesting. On the one hand, they are a government agency, and as such are funded and therefore answerable to them. On the other hand, many organizations that are part of the platform are not answerable to the government, and often position themselves opposed to or critical of the government and their policy.

ESD policy was shaped by two main factors: its intersection with NEE and (inter)national discourse on climate change and sustainability. The former is primarily recognizable by a multi stakeholder and co creation approach and the emphasis on nature and environment as the main part of ESD. The latter firstly played a key role in the broadening of NEE, and its emphasis on local governance facilitated the policy integration of ESD and NEE. Secondly, international reports and commitments influenced all levels of Dutch discourse, introducing new ideas, highlighting good and bad practices, and creating public awareness.

### ***Conclusion***

This literature review aimed to provide context to understand the current Dutch policy landscape surrounding Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education by examining the key ideas and discourse in their historical development. The review has exhibited that ESD and CE have different origins, and highlighted

different ideas and discourses that influenced its development up to the present day. The findings from the literature review are used to provide the context in which to place the arguments from the political debate analysis and to answer the main research question.

## **Results**

In this section, this thesis means to discover why there is a difference in the justification for current ESD and CE policy in the Netherlands. The DI framework, as mentioned, focuses on ideas and discourse. It also distinguishes different types of ideas and discourse. Since justification of policy takes place in the coordinative sphere, this is where the analysis took place. The following paragraphs present the results of a discursive analysis of several debates, held by members of the Second Chamber and the government. In the Netherlands, two third of debates between Second Chamber members and ministers are so called ‘committees’ (as per the website of the Second Chamber, last accessed on June 5th, 2022). In these committees, the political parties in the second chamber are represented and they are considered the backbone of Dutch Second Chamber (as per the website of the Second Chamber, last accessed on June 5th, 2022). The committees handle plans and proposition by ministers, state secretaries or the Second Chamber through debate, discussion, and research. The more thorough coverage of issues compared to plenary debates make the committees a good point of analysis. Some topics do not have their own committee however, and coverage is then found in plenary debates with the entire Second Chamber. For these reasons, three debates were analysed. First a legislative consultation on changing a number of education laws with regard to the clarification of the citizenship mandate to schools in foundational education. This debate was chosen because it was the final one in the law’s legislative

process, providing overviews of used arguments and being closest to the current context. Secondly, a legislative consultation on the 2020 budget of the ministry of ECS, including the part green education. This debate was picked because it is the only one with ESD (albeit the terminology used was ‘green education’) as one of the focuses and held in the analysed governmental period. Finally, a plenary debate concerning the ongoing primary education curriculum reform. This final debate was fitting because it included both ESD and CE policy discussions, allowing for an examination of the relative importance of the topics. A note can already be made about the number of debates available on the subject. Within the analysed governmental period, using the Second Chambers ‘missed debate’ repository, thirty-two debates were found where CE was mentioned, in five of those more than three times. When using the term ‘green education’, fifteen debates were found, with only two having more than three mentions of the terms. The term ‘sustainable education’ yielded four results, only being mentioned one time. ‘Education for sustainable development’ as a search term yielded no results at all.

### ***Citizenship education***

The first analysed debate was a legislative consultation, held by the permanent committee of the ministry of Education Culture and Science, on ‘changing a number of education laws with regard to the clarification of the citizenship mandate to schools in foundational education.’. Ten Second Chamber members were present together with the minister of ECS. It consisted of two rounds. In the first, members were allotted time for a speech, in which they presented their view and could ask questions to the minister. Other members were allowed to interrupt to ask questions or clarification. After the first round the minister answered all questions, to which the members could respond again in

the second round. Here members could also propose amendments to the bill or propose motions. These were either approved or discouraged by the minister and as such proposed to the Second Chamber for a vote.

Two themes characterized this debate: teacher safety in the face of student radicalization and the clash between different constitutional articles. The former instigated by the then recent beheading of French teacher Samuel Paty and a Dutch teacher going into hiding after receiving threats for a satiric depiction of a jihadist. This was mentioned in every opening statement made during the debate. The latter made salient by a Christian school requiring parents to sign a declaration condemning homosexuality for admission. This was mentioned in six out of nine opening statements, and those who did not mention it did there did discuss it later.

Justification for CE were made on the basis of two main lines of argumentation. On the one hand, background ideational ideas about the role of education and the citizen in society were used to justify the mandate of the government to interfere in this area. For example, one member argued:

*'Social cohesion is not self-evident when it comes to good and evil. [...] Students should be enabled to independently form critical opinions and find truths, to fathom the democratic rule of law, and actively contribute to society. [...] it is also good that this proposal has more handholds to interfere when schools tread outside of the borders of the democratic rule of law.'* (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2020c, p3-4)

On the other hand, the need for CE was justified by pointing to then recent societal developments such as increased radicalization, relative lack of knowledge of Dutch

students about civic matters or the intimidation of teachers. In this argument, CE was presented as a policy solution to these developments based on cognitive arguments. An argument in the opening statement of the VVD<sup>6</sup> member illustrates this point:

*'The results of citizenship education in the Netherlands have not been in order for years. [...] now, in 2020, a Dutch teacher has to go into hiding because there was a satiric image in his classroom. [...] It is an increasing societal problem. [...] This is why I am glad that we incorporated this proposal into the governmental accord.'* (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2020c, p20-21)

While most members used both lines of argumentation, trends can be seen in who uses which arguments. Left/progressive wing members<sup>7</sup> tend to focus on the first line of argumentation, only pointing to recent developments as justification for the mandate needing to be made more explicit. Right/conservative members tended to focus on the recent developments as the main reason something needs to be done, using them as an argument for the need for government action. Exemplified by the PVV, who gave an inflammatory speech during the debate, to which no one responded.

Arguments explicitly against CE were not present. Much critique was offered about the specific wording and content of the proposed law specifically, but only in one case they amounted to a rejection of it, and explicitly not of CE as a whole. This rejection was done by a member of the SGP, a conservative Christian party which has never been in government, and has a small voting base (from parlement.com, accessed June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Critique was divisible into two main arguments. The first was the argument that enforcement of the law is not sufficient with the current wording, and that the mandate

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<sup>6</sup> See ProDemos (2013, p24-26) for a more elaborate discussion of the grouping of Dutch political parties.

<sup>7</sup> Based upon the positioning of the parties by ProDemos (2013). Left and right concern socio-economic stances, while progressive and conservative indicates the parties' position on personal freedom.

should be more enforceable. The other was that the proposed law already goes too far with enforcement, and that it encroaches on the freedom of education. This dichotomy makes up the bulk of the debate surrounding the proposed law and is exemplified in the discussion around whether schools are allowed to ask for a signed a declaration condemning homosexuality for admission. In the justification of CE policy, normative philosophical ideas were present in opening statements, and when affirming the general need for CE. Foreground discursive abilities were used to build upon this argument, with current events and context serving as the medium for the arguments.

### *Education for sustainable development*

In the analysed governmental period, no debates were found with ESD, or related terms like ‘sustainable education’ or ‘green education’ as a central topic. Instead, discussion on this topic was scattered amongst different topics, such as budget discussions of ministries that (partially) coordinate ESD activities. The analysed debate was also a legislative consultation; on the 2020 budget of the ministry of ECS, including the part green education (Tweede Kamer 2017). The green education budget had just been transferred from the ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate. ESD formed a very small part of the topics discussed in the legislative consultation. Discussion on the topic was held by only a few of the members present. These members represented different sides of the political spectrum, although the biggest advocate came from the left/progressive party PvDD.

Argumentation was only done on using foreground discursive abilities and centred on cognitive policy and programmatic ideas on the place of ESD in the budget and overall education strategy. In terms of budget, several members argued for the



budget for to be increased: by doubling the budget for Learning for Tomorrow, or by compensating the lack of funding resulting from a slow implementation of new budget policy from the government. On both fronts, motions were submitted proposing this, providing programmatic solutions. In terms of the place of sustainability in education, the present parties agreed on, or did not voice an opinion counter to, the notion that it is an all-encompassing topic, which should be embedded in the entirety of education:

*“So then you would want sustainability like a coat over the entirety of education. Mr. van Raan is surely not advocating for sustainability as an extra subject, am I right?”*

*“Thank you for that question. As far as we are understanding that sustainability is [also] cultural education, is it in our opinion evident that this is at the basis of all subjects. You could call that a coat, that is correct.” (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 2017, p10)*

The response from the minister of primary & secondary education and media to matters concerning ESD was categorical, even though several members pushed back on it: there was no room in the budget for increased funding for ESD, and any discussion about the place of sustainability in the curriculum was to be held in the legislative process surrounding the revision of the curriculum (curriculum.nu). Consequently, all motions and amendments on this front were deemed ‘not recommended’ by the minister and did not pass the vote in the Second Chamber. When the minister did not recommend a motion, he was appealing to background ideational ideas on how debates and legislation are supposed to proceed, and not necessarily disagreeing with the content of the motions and amendments.

### *Curriculum reform*

The final debate analysed was a plenary discussion, held by the Second Chamber, on curriculum.nu. In order to hold a plenary debate, a simple majority needs to be present in the Chamber building. However, when the debate is about a specific topic, generally not many members are present (as acknowledge by the Second Chamber on their website, accessed June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022). In this case, only the members of the standard committee on ECW were present, and the debate has the same dynamics as a legislative consultation.

In the discussion on the curriculum reform, citizenship education was not debated much. Arguments in the debate specifically about CE were repeated, mostly in the form of concern about either too little obligation for CE, or about the overburdening of the curriculum by including it. Both arguments were rational ideas on the effects of the implementation of the policy. In any case, members accepted CE as an integral part of the reform, and the discourse was not at all concerned with its justification. In the debate surrounding the development of a new curriculum, ESD, and the integration of sustainability into education in general, was mentioned more often when compared to the first debate. Multiple members recognized and mentioned sustainability as an educational area that was necessary and only to grow in importance in the coming years. These members used this as justification for its inclusion in the curriculum. However, this was never a normative argument, but instead formulated as a cognitive policy solution to current developments. The members never used their foreground discursive abilities to advocate for an elevated position of ESD in the curriculum. Normative philosophical ideas did not play a role in the justification of ESD policy.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this thesis was to find out why there are differences in the political justification of Dutch Government policy on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education. Using discursive institutionalism as a framework, this thesis first investigated the history of the Dutch education policy context in regard to CE and ESD. Subsequently, an analysis of political debates in the coordinative sphere were analysed to search for the justification of current policy. This discussion will first highlight general differences found in the discursive analysis, then dive deeper into a comparison of ideas and discourse before synthesising the results with the literature review.

### ***General differences***

From the outset of the result gathering, it becomes clear that CE received more attention in the coordinative discourse compared to ESD, as evidenced by the difference in the number of debates available on both topics noted in the results. The literature reviewed shows, two different legislative processes took place with CE as their focus. ESD by contrast was not the real focus of any policy debates, and responsibility for its funding and implementation has involved three different ministries. The results showed that the debate concerning CE centred around whether certain parts of the proposed policy could be justified when considering the trade-offs, primarily the infringement on freedom of education. The need for CE was recognized, and the justification for this was not hotly contested, with only the conservative Christian party denouncing the policy on grounds of religious freedom. Debates that (partially) concerned ESD did not follow this pattern at all. If anything, the coordinative discourse reinforced the status quo implicitly by not discussing the justification for policy on ESD. This disparity could

also be seen in the way the two concepts are mentioned. While there was of course much debate about what the meaning of citizenship is, all involved parties agreed on its usage. With ESD, this was not the case. As seen in the results in fact, ESD as a term was not mentioned once. Instead, to indicate the concept, different terms such as *sustainable education*, *green education*, or *sustainability in education* were used. Interestingly, this difference in terminology was never addressed as such, only tangentially being brought up when discussing sustainability's place in the curriculum as a whole (see page 25).

### ***Ideas***

As mentioned previously under the heading 'discursive institutionalism', this thesis distinguished two different types of ideas, and three different levels of ideas: cognitive and normative ideas; and policy, programmatic, and philosophical ideas. There were several ideas that played a large role in the political debate on CE that are identified in the results. Firstly, the notion that there were issues in society that require CE to be solved: the effects of multiculturalism on education and lack of knowledge about democratic institutions among Dutch students. For all but one party, this provided a strong enough basis to advocate for the current policy, or for even more stringent policy. Programmatic ideas were more varied, concerning for example how the educational inspection should maintain oversight, how the policy should safeguard the safety of LGBTQIA+ students, or how schools should operationalize the mandate. Underlying philosophical ideas were about the role of the government and the citizen in society, the importance of different constitutional rights, and different values such as national identity and societal involvement. For ESD, giving such an extensive overview of the different ideas is more difficult, because there are not that many. All parties but

one shared the idea that sustainability will continue to play a larger role in the future, and that it should therefore be included in education. The exception came from the PVV, who are anthropogenic climate change sceptics, evidenced by their own party programme (PVV 2021). On the programmatic level, ideas concerned budget allocation and how sustainability should be integrated into the curriculum. But again, compared to CE, these were only shortly mentioned and not often repeated. Only one committee member uttered a philosophical idea about ESD during the debate, arguing that sustainability is a value we should instil in children.

### *Discourse*

Schmidt (2008) identified two different abilities that allow actors to maintain or change institutions. These are background ideational abilities, and foreground discursive abilities. The results show that in regard to CE, the institutional change proposed by the new law, were argued for using foreground discursive abilities in response to societal developments. The discussion around the policy was a deliberation about institutional rules that are currently active, and many politicians in the commission were or had been teachers as well. However, even though it is called a legislative consultation, the debates held were one directional. While individual members asked each other questions or ask for clarifications, most of the discourse was aimed at the minister of primary and secondary education, who then responded point by point to all the members. The debate format sometimes hindered attempts at persuasion between the different members. This was because each speaker had time allotted for their speech, a set number of interruptions, and questions were also limited by the moderator. Additionally, the results showed that some members did not seek to engage on certain topics.

The results showed different discourse on ESD compared to CE. The discourse had the same orientation around the minister, and there was less pushback towards the minister in the form of questions or comments. Foreground discursive abilities were only used by members questioning the budget allocation of green education in light of its recent transfer. Background ideational abilities played a bigger role. The minister used existing institutional rules and practices as an argument for not changing the budget or engaging in certain parts of the discussion. The nature of this setting was not questioned, even if the change in budget allocation might have been a jumping off point to do so.

### *Synthesis*

The different histories of CE and ESD align with the findings from the discursive analysis. Firstly, ESD is a new concept, only being properly introduced to the discourse in the 1990s as discussed in the literature review, and the related discourse and ideas that preceded it, changed in nature repeatedly. In the current coordinative sphere, ESD was also discussed less. As a concept, the language used to describe it is vague and varied, and political responsibility for its implementation is diffused. Based on the findings from the literature review and the discursive analysis, it is difficult to say whether these two factors influenced each other, or whether they were separate issues. Secondly, the politization of the topics is another factor that corroborates the two analyses. The justification for CE used different aspects that appeal to different political parties. For example by pointing to the dangers of multiculturalism, the need for social cohesion, or the lack of knowledge of our democracy among Dutch students. This broad support was not present for ESD, as any argument for ESD first has to acknowledge the

reality of anthropogenic climate change, which is not recognized by two political parties in the Netherlands, representing 15.78% of votes in the national elections of 2021 (as reported by the website Kiesraad, accessed June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Additionally, the liberal party VVD has led the four most recent government coalitions. This party significantly cut the nature and environment conservation budget, the precursor to ESD (Buijs, Mattijssen, and Arts 2014). Similarly, they had not included ESD in the coalition agreement, providing less incentive for ministries to engage with the topic. Their attitude towards nature and environment conservation might have had a significant impact on ESD policy because of the (historical) conflation of the two topics.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis aimed to answer the question: Why are there differences in the justification of Dutch Government policy on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship Education? To do so, the theoretical framework of Discursive Institutionalism was used to provide an overview of the historical context of ESD and CE policy. Then, a discursive analysis of the current political debate was done to gain insight into the current justification for ESD and CE policy. The literature review showed the different historical origins of ESD and CE policy, the former evolving from nature and environment education in the 1990s, the latter emerging from societal debates during the Second World War. Key ideas and discourse on ESD concerned nature and environment conservation, global developments on sustainability and interdisciplinary and interdepartmental approaches. Key ideas and discourse on CE concerned individual responsibility, democratic values, multiculturalism, and the responsibility of education. The discursive analysis showed that ESD is much less

discussed in the analysed part of the coordinative discourse, and that less attempts are made to change this. It showed both the use of foreground discursive abilities to change policy in the CE debate, and the use of background ideational abilities to maintain policy in the ESD policy debate. The discussion evaluated these arguments and showed the compatibility of the results from the literature review and discursive analysis in providing an explanation. To answer the main question: the difference in justification for ESD and CE policy stems from their different historical origins and from their current politization. The different historical origins have resulted in a clear place for CE policy in the political debate, while for ESD policy it has led to unclear terminology and shifting responsibility for its implementation. CE policy also receives more broad political support, due to the different contemporary problems that can be used to argue for it. ESD policy on the other hand concerns more polarizing topics such as climate change and sustainability. This implies that the justification for ESD and CE policy is not influenced by the analysed debates themselves, where it is only reinforced.

While the different analysis presents a comprehensive and explanatory conclusion, some limitations have to be acknowledged. Firstly, the limited scope of the discursive analysis. Due to the allocated time for the thesis, the discursive analysis only thoroughly analysed three debates, potentially missing a part of the debates in the committees. The committees, while two thirds of the debates held in the second chamber, do not represent the entire coordinative discourse. Secondly, a limitation could be the positionality of the author, as the interpretation of ideas and discourse is difficult to do fully objectively. Future research could improve on these limitations by replicating these findings, covering more ground, and providing a second perspective. A recommendation for future research would be to include an analysis of other actors



within the coordinative sphere, such as civil servants, experts, and activists. Educational reforms are still taking place, and policy on Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship education might change in the future as global challenges of sustainability and citizenship continue to grow in importance.

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