

Dutch environmental debates and the concept of ‘selective growth’: Greening the economy in the 1970s

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Abstract

In 1971, due to the dismal forecasts of the Limits to Growth leaking out in the press, the environment suddenly became a pressing and hotly debated issue in Dutch politics. Besides the first practical steps in policy-making, this changing attitude towards the environment forced political parties, social partners and civil society to a conceptual reorientation in order to align their traditional view on 'progress' with the new reality of pollution, 'negative externalities' and 'limits to growth'.

As such, the early 1970s saw the rise of several new concepts and approaches to address both environmental issues and future economic development, ranging from zero growth to responsible growth and selective contraction. Soon 'selective growth' was embraced and became widely seen as an ideal concept to transcend the paralyzing dichotomy between pro- and anti-growth, integrating instead economic and environmental objectives.

By analyzing this conceptual history from a multi-level perspective, including both parliamentary debates and actual policy-making, this paper will compare the new discourse of 'selective growth' with the direction Dutch environmental and economic policy took in the mid-1970s. This analysis will attempt to deepen our understanding of environmental discourses and the conceptual roots of the 'green economy'.

Author information

Dr Jonne Harmsma is a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Parliamentary History at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He is currently working in a research project focusing on Dutch political and parliamentary history in the 1970s. Within this project, Harmsma specializes in environmental policy and economic-financial history. In his doctoral dissertation, completed in 2018, he studied the life of Jelle Zijlstra (1918-2001), former prime minister of the Netherlands and president of the Dutch central bank, and published his thesis as a critically acclaimed biography. Furthermore, Harmsma published articles in Dutch and English about expertise, political leadership, economic thinking, neo- and ordoliberalism and Dutch environmental history.

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Monday, 21 June - Session 10 - **10,30-12,00 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *Environmental Policies as a Multi-Layered Discursive Phenomenon*

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