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## Original Article

# Deconstructing the Dutch multicultural model: A frame perspective on Dutch immigrant integration policymaking

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**Abstract** Dutch immigrant integration policies have often been labelled ‘multiculturalist’. This article empirically and conceptually challenges the idea of a Dutch multicultural model. First, it deconstructs the image that Dutch policies would have been driven by a single, coherent and consistent model, by drawing attention to the much more dynamic processes of problem framing, frame-shifts and frame conflicts that characterize Dutch policymaking. Second – and as a result of this dynamic perspective – it will become clear that Dutch policies were not that multicultural at all. Adopting a neo-institutionalist perspective, it reconceptualizes ‘models of integration’ as specific discourses or ‘frames’. On the basis of a rigorous analysis of policy documents and public debate (media records and parliamentary records), as well as an extensive review of the Dutch and international literature, the article analyzes how immigrant integration policies in the Netherlands have been framed over the past decades, and how the rise and fall of specific frames can be accounted for.

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## Introduction: From Models to Frames

Dutch immigrant integration policies have often been labelled ‘multiculturalist’. In fact, the Dutch approach is often considered an almost ideal-typical case



of multiculturalist policies (Koopmans, 2002, p. 91; Joppke, 2004, p. 248; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007, pp. 1–2): a multicultural model. A key trait of the multicultural model would be that the Dutch have tended to institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. respect, Dutch multicultural policies are often considered directly linked to the Dutch history of pillarization, or the period in the early and mid-twentieth century where Dutch society was institutionally fragmented for specific national minorities (Protestants, Catholics, Liberals, Socialists).

This idea of ‘national models of integration’ like the Dutch multicultural model is inspired by historical-institutionalist thinking and has acquired great resonance in European migration research (Brubaker, 1992; Cornelius *et al*, 1994; Koopmans *et al*, 2005). A key trait of such national models is that they are expected to be relatively stable over fairly long periods of time, based on the assumption that the conditions that led to a specific model are unlikely to change rapidly and that models themselves tend to develop a certain path-dependency or resistance to change. This models-thinking has emerged not only in academic discourse, but also in self-referential public and political discourse on immigrant integration within specific countries. A key reference in this models-thinking is Brubaker’s (1992) analysis of French and German immigrant policies, which revealed the historical conditions in both countries that led to the construction of these national models: a strongly developed cultural and apolitical sense of national belonging in Germany versus the state-centric tradition of nation building in France.

Thränhardt and Bommers (2010) show that, as they describe it, paradigms of migration are inherently bound to nation-states. They argue that these paradigms are national ‘not just because of their context dependency and insufficient clarifications on the conditions of generalizability, they are national because the modes of presenting and questions are politically constituted by the nation-states for which migration becomes a problem or a challenge’ (p. 10). Similarly, Favell (2003, p. 47) shows that national models of integration are often the product of the ‘exclusively internal national political dynamics’ or ‘self-sufficiency’ of debates on immigrant integration in politics as well as in migration research. Thus, the development of these national paradigms must be considered a consequence of nation–state centeredness of policy (and academic) discourses, rather than as accurate representations of the uniquely national character of immigrant integration policies. In fact, as Thränhardt and Bommers argue, national paradigms have distorted international comparative research (see also Bommers and Morawska, 2005), often leading to what Favell (2003, p. 48) describes as ‘self-justificatory discourse’ (see for instance the role that French–American antagonism played in the justification



of the French republican model: Fassin, 1999). Also, conceptualizing and theorizing immigrant integration in a generic (not nation-specific) way would only recently have become more widespread, among others due to the developments on the European level (Geddes, 2005) and because of internationalization of migration research (Favell, 2003).

Models are helpful in reducing complexity: they simplify the otherwise highly complex and contested matter of immigrant integration (Bader, 2007; Bowen, 2007). They help to construct international comparative studies to assess processes of convergence or divergence between various European countries. Furthermore, when used as ideal-types, models can, when confronted with specific periods, generate insight in a country's history. In this latter sense, Castles and Miller (2003) and, in their footsteps, Koopmans and Statham (2000) have extended Brubaker's dichotomy into a fourfold typology of integration models: civic-assimilationism, cultural pluralism, ethnic-differentialism and civic-republicanism. An important difference with the historical-institutionalist modelling of Brubaker is that this fourfold distinction of integration models represents ideal-types that can be used for studying country cases, rather than that these models are taken as representative for national approaches *per se* (see also Scholten, 2011).

However, critics of the idea of national models of integration have argued that these models are often not only taken as tools for international comparison or for understanding historical periods (Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2009). When a model begins to shape our understanding and beliefs about policies, the model becomes more than just a model: the model is then taken as an accurate historical reconstruction of policy rather than as a model of it. In addition, models tend to oversimplify policies and overstress the alleged coherency and consistency of these policies (Bowen, 2007; Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2009, in this volume). Policy practices tend to be far more resilient and diverse than most policy models would suggest.

Thus, national models tend to overlook the often much more dynamic character of immigrant integration policies. Alternatively, from a more neo-institutionalist perspective, attention has been drawn to the process of immigrant integration policy-making and to the role of narrative construction or 'framing' in these policy-making processes (Bleich, 2003; Boswell *et al*, 2011; Scholten, 2011). Rather than stressing primarily how national models structure policy-making and public discourse, this framing approach focuses on how social meaning is attributed to immigrant integration by actors within specific institutional settings. A frame thus becomes an inherently selective and normative way of defining, interpreting and explaining a specific issue (Rein and Schön, 1994). Frames help making sense out of the complex social reality that is often associated with issues as immigrant integration, they are tools for 'naming' and 'framing' the problem and determining adequate paths for policy



action. Scholten (2011) operationalizes frames of immigrant integration into four elements: the wording or naming of the problem (problem definition), the social categorization of involved target groups, causal theories or ‘causal stories’ to make the leap from what ‘is’ to what ‘ought to be’, and finally an underlying selection of relevant values and norms.

From this framing perspective, the issue of whether there is one dominant frame or ‘model’ of immigrant integration becomes an empirical question, rather than an analytical assumption. Regardless of whether models are really there or not, our understanding of these ‘national models’ is enhanced by conceptualizing them as socially constructed frames or discourses. The historical–cultural premises on which national models can be based are often also products of situated discourses. Hence, Anderson (1991) speaks of ‘imagined national communities’ that are in constant need for discursive and political (re)production. In addition, the framing perspective questions the objectivist relation between migration flows, integration problems and national models of migration policies. It considers these ‘objective conditions’ as selectively and subjectively defined factors in the framing of migration policies; whether specific conditions are really there and whether they should be considered a problem (take for instance migrant delinquency, political mobilization among migrants and so on) are often a stake in political processes rather than a mere condition to it.

In the case of migration studies, this means that national models of immigrant integration should be taken as object of analysis rather than as a starting point for analysis; they should be seen as malleable and dynamic frames rather than rigid and institutionalized models.

## Defining the Dutch Multicultural Model

A key trait of the multicultural model as constructed in Dutch political and academic discourse, would be that the Dutch have tended to institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. In the latter respect, often a connection is made with the peculiar Dutch history of pillarization, referring to the period from the 1920s to 1960s when most of Dutch society was structured according to specific religious (protestant, Catholic) or socio-cultural (socialist, liberal) pillars (Lijphart, 1968).

The study by Sniderman and Hagendoorn, *When Ways of Life Collide: Multiculturalism and its Discontents in the Netherlands*, explicitly label the Dutch approach in terms of a multiculturalist model. The authors claim that the labelling of collective identities has inadvertently deepened social–cultural cleavages in society rather than bridging these differences. They take the



Netherlands as their single exemplary case to find their claims. They root the Dutch approach back to the history of pillarization: 'The Netherlands has always been a country of minorities thanks to the power of religion to divide as well as unite' (p. 13). In addition, the 'collective trauma of World War II where the Dutch failed to resist the massive deportation of Jews would have contributed to that immigrant minorities have been seen in the light of the Holocaust (...) or that critical views of immigrants are labelled racist and xenophobic'. Owing to these historical circumstances, a multiculturalist model would have taken root in the Netherlands.

Also among Dutch scholars, thinking in terms of the Dutch multicultural model has acquired great resonance. For instance, the sociologist Koopmans roots the Dutch approach to immigrant integration clearly in the history of pillarization when ethno-cultural cleavages were stressed in a similar way in multicultural policies. While recognizing that in public and political discourse the multicultural model now seems to have been deserted, Koopmans points to the 'path-dependency' in terms of policy practices. Although formal policy discourse and public discourse seem to have changed, in their actual way of dealing with ethno-cultural diversity the Dutch would have remained accommodative:

The Netherlands is still an extreme representative of a 'multicultural' vision of integration. The country allows immigrants easy access to formal social and political rights while at the same time facilitating expressions of foreigners' own cultural identity with the help of the state. (...) (T)he Dutch (...) seem to think that this multicultural model is a thing of the past. But nothing could be further from the truth. Outside the limited world of op-eds in high-brow newspapers, the relation between Dutch society and its immigrants is still firmly rooted in its tradition of pillarization. (...) (O)rganizations and activities based on ethnic grounds are still generously supported – directly and indirectly – by the government. Whether people want it or not, ethnicity still plays an important role in public institutions and discourse. (Koopmans, 2007, p. 4)

Whereas in the actual debate Sniderman and Hagendoorn, Joppke, and Koopmans are important scholars who voice this idea that the Netherlands have been pursuing a 'radical multiculturalist approach' (Koopmans *et al*, 2005, p. 143) and blamed this model for various adverse effects, they were not the first to do so. In particular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, several authors already criticized Dutch policies because of their overtly multiculturalist approach. In 1989, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*, or WRR) published



a report (*Immigrant Policy*) in which it called for a more socio-economically and individually focused policy approach. The WRR called attention to the alleged inadvertent effects of the focus on minority groups and the labelling of these groups in terms of an accumulation of socio-economic deprivation and social-cultural differences (WRR, 1989, p. 9). Furthermore, it rejected the dominant framing of 'ethnic' or 'cultural minorities', arguing that this classification was 'arbitrary and prompted more by historical than by social considerations', and that this was a 'too limited concept' for describing the 'dynamism' in the social positions of immigrants and would be 'stigmatizing' (pp. 43, 54). Instead, the WRR proposed to define migrants as 'allochthonous' (a difficult to translate Dutch term for first as well as second-generation immigrants) stressing the non-native descent of immigrants rather than their ethno-cultural position. Furthermore, the WRR claimed that the integration policy (and debate) should no longer focus primarily on issues of 'cultural and morality' (p. 18), but rather on the socio-economic participation of migrants (p. 9). On the cultural domain, the role of government should be far more limited: 'T]he institutionalization of ethnic pluralism must not be regarded as an independent policy objective' (p. 61, our translation).

About the same time, Jan Rath published his dissertation *Minorisation: The Social Construction of Ethnic Minorities* (1991). He considers the 'multicultural model' a product of a technocratic community of experts and policy-makers and deconstructs the ideological principles on which it was based. Rath 'models' the Dutch approach in terms of what he calls the 'Minorities Paradigm'. This Minorities Paradigm defines society in terms of distinct groups or 'minorities' whose position is characterized both by a weak socio-economic position and by social-cultural differences. According to Rath, Dutch policy adopted the Minorities Paradigm because it legitimizes government intervention in the position of ethnic minorities, but also allows to exclude minorities from political and economic processes because of their social-cultural non-conformity. Hence, according to Rath, it is no surprise that the ethnic minorities policy of the 1980s seems to have failed, as it contributed to a further 'minorization' of ethnic minorities rather than to an amelioration of their social and political position in society. Rath does not root the Dutch model in the history of pillarization, but rather traces it back to the ideological principles of how Dutch society approached anti-social families (1999). Just like ethnic minorities, these anti-social families were problematized, not just because of their underclass status but also because of their social-cultural non-conformity. Such cultural arguments legitimized government interference with these groups. Moreover, they also helped to strengthen the 'imagined national community' by stressing their non-conformity. What the approaches to both groups have in common is that they connect socio-economic and social-cultural issues, that is, that they culturalize underlying socio-economic



differences. As such, Rath defines the Dutch model as a product of class differences and ideological conflict in Dutch society rather than as a legacy from the history of pillarism.

## **The Dutch Model in Question: Frame-Shifts and Frame-Conflicts**

### **Frame-shifts: The rise and fall of multiculturalism in the Netherlands**

Contrary to what many observers assume, empirical analysis of formal policy discourse reveals a strong discontinuity in Dutch immigrant policy over the past three to four decades (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2004; Entzinger, 2006; Scholten, 2011). Reconstructing the history of Dutch immigrant integration policies reveals at least four policy paradigms of immigrant integration.

At first, until well into the 1970s, Dutch government remained reluctant to develop a policy for immigrant integration, although large migrant groups had been settling in the Netherlands already since the 1950s. The presence of migrants (both labour and colonial migrants) was considered temporary. Policies were mainly *ad hoc*, aimed at participation in the economic sphere and retention of identity in the social-cultural sphere. This phase of denial was based on a normative belief that the Netherlands was not and should not be a country of immigration.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Dutch government developed an Ethnic Minorities Policy that had distinct 'multiculturalist' traits. The policy problem was now reconceptualized in terms of participation and social-cultural emancipation of ethnic or cultural minorities. Migrants were framed as 'minorities' in Dutch society instead of temporary guests, and government decided to focus on those minorities whose position was characterized by an accumulation of cultural and socio-economic difficulties and for whom the Dutch government felt a special historical responsibility (Rath, 2001). The Minorities Policy expressed the idea that an amelioration of the social-cultural position of migrants would also improve their socio-economic position. The policy objective was to combat discrimination and socio-economic deprivation and to support social-cultural emancipation. In this context, the institutionalization of cultural pluralism continued in this period (such as broadcast media for several groups, Immigrant Language and Culture Instruction, religious facilities), but now with the aim of integration in society rather than facilitating return migration.

The Ethnic Minorities Policy developed in this period in particular is often brought in direct relation to the Dutch history of pillarization (Lijphart, 1968). Indeed, the Dutch approach to the integration of immigrant minorities as developed in the 1980s bears a resemblance to the emancipation of national minorities in the beginning of the twentieth century. This concerns, for



instance, the establishment of specific schools and broadcast media for ethnic minorities. Yet, the *intended* continuity between pillarization and immigrant integration policy should be questioned. First of all, at the time of the formulation of Dutch immigrant integration policies in the end of the 1970s, Dutch society was going through a process of depillarization that had already set in during as early as the 1960s. Second, minority groups never came even close to the level of organization that national minorities obtained in the early twentieth century. As Rath and his colleagues put it: 'in terms of institutional arrangements, there is no question of an Islamic pillar in the Netherlands, or at least one that is in any way comparable to the Roman Catholic or Protestant pillars in the past' (Rath *et al*, 1999, p. 59).

Rather than clear institutional path-dependency, it seems that the Dutch legacy of pillarism did play a role but more in a discursive than in an institutional way in the framing of the Ethnic Minorities Policy in this period. Vink (2007) describes this as a 'pillarization reflex'. When faced with the issue of immigrant incorporation at the end of the 1970s, Dutch policymakers resorted to the traditional frame of pillarization for providing meaning to the new issue of immigrant integration. However, it must be added that few policymakers in the 1980s really embraced pillarization as a normative ideal. In fact, as Vink argues, defining slogans as 'integration with preservation of cultural identity' were rejected already at this early stage; only later this slogan would be ex-post projected on this period in public and academic discourse (Vink, 2007, pp. 344–345). In addition, neither pillarization nor multiculturalism were really embraced as normative ideals, they simply referred in a more descriptive sense to increasing social diversity. Beside this pillarization reflex, it is evident that several *generic* legacies of pillarization affected immigrant integration processes rather than immigrant integration policies *per se*, in particular the constitutional right to establish (state-funded) religious schools and broadcast media (Duyvendak *et al*, 2009).

This Ethnic Minorities policy came under growing pressure by the end of the 1980s. Subsequently, in the early 1990s, the Minorities Policy was reframed into an Integration Policy that stressed socio-economic participation of immigrants as citizens or 'allochthonous'. Rather than categorizing migrants based on ethno-cultural traits, migrants were categorized on an individual basis based on foreign descent. The underlying causal story was now that socio-economic improvement was a condition for a better position in the social-cultural sphere as well. Clearly, the more multiculturalist frame of the 1980s was now exchanged for a more liberal-egalitarian frame. This was already an early retreat from multiculturalism. Promoting 'good' or 'active' citizenship became the primary policy goal, stimulating individual migrants to live up to their civic rights as well as their duties and to become economically independent participants in society.





However, this policy frame also lasted no more than a decade or so. Although the socio-economic position of migrants improved significantly in the 1990s, this was not considered a ‘success’ of this policy. Instead, more and more attention was drawn to the cultural dimension of integration, in a very different way than in the 1980s: an assimilationist turn took place in Dutch integration policy at the start of the new Millennium. A second broad national debate took place in 2000 in response to claims that Dutch policy had caused a ‘multicultural tragedy’ (Scheffer, 2000). Among others, the populist politician Fortuyn made the claim that the Dutch integration approach had failed, especially in socio-cultural terms, into one of his central political issues. This set in motion a gradual assimilationist turn, which was codified in an ‘Integration Policy New Style’. Whereas the Integration Policy had stressed ‘active citizenship’, the Integration Policy New Style stressed ‘common citizenship’, which meant that ‘the unity of society must be found in what members have in common (...), that is that people speak Dutch, and that one abides to basic Dutch norms’. Persisting social-cultural differences were now considered a hindrance to immigrant integration. Moreover, the integration policy was increasingly linked to a broader public and political concern about the preservation of national identity and social cohesion in Dutch society.

The Centre-Right coalition led by Prime Minister Rutte that came to power in 2010, discursively promoted assimilation, national unity and ‘Dutchness’, but actually did not do much in this realm, despite expectations given the political composition of this coalition (with support by the anti-immigrant Freedom Party). As a matter of fact, government seemed to withdraw from pursuing active integration policies, focusing instead much more on limiting immigration.

### **Frame-conflicts and the multiplicity of frames**

The preceding reconstruction shows that there was not one Dutch ‘model’ of immigrant integration. It reveals periods of relative stability when policy was based on a particular frame, interrupted by frame-shifts that led to very different ways of understanding immigrant integration. However, this does not mean that even within these periods of relative stability, the Dutch approach was always unambiguous and generally accepted. In fact, there are many indications that the Dutch approach(es) have been contested on many occasions.

First of all, Dutch immigrant integration policies have not only been very dynamic *over time*, policies in different periods also seem to have contradicted each other; there are various instances of frame-conflict *between* the different policy episodes. This involves not just the reluctance of government until well



into the 1970s to develop a policy aimed at permanent residence and integration, which had negative consequences in various respects for the later policies aimed at integration. Another clear inconsistency over time, and source of protracted conflict, was the categorization or social construction of migrants as policy target groups. Migrants have been defined based on national origin (until the 1970s), as ethnic or cultural minorities (until the 1980s), and as ‘allochthonous’ or simply as ‘new citizens’ (since 1990s). These labels not only differed but also conflicted as for instance the labelling as national groups stressed the connections with the country of origin, whereas the minorities-label stresses the position within the country of settlement. Furthermore, the categorization of ethnic minorities conflicted with the more individual-focus of the label of allochthonous. In this respect, Rath (1991, 2001) has rightly argued that the social construction of minorities has inadvertently contributed to the process of ‘minorization’ (see also De Zwart, in this volume).

The contradictions in policy approaches from various periods have been most pronounced in the sphere of cultural integration (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2004). Whereas in the 1980s, the preservation of cultural identity was seen as an important condition for the cultural emancipation of minorities in Dutch society, over the past decade cultural diversity has become increasingly seen as an obstacle for integration. In the early 1990s, government already ‘de-coupled’ social-cultural and socio-economic integration, with the former being attributed to the private sphere and government concentrating primarily on the latter (Duyvendak *et al*, 2009). Since the turn of the Millennium, the social-cultural sphere has again become more central in government policies, but now with the aim of cultural adaptation rather than cultural emancipation: with the cultivation of the own cultural identities, it is not possible to bridge differences.

In sum, over time, and mainly as a result of the variation in the socio-cultural objectives, there were significant shifts in the policy visions regarding the relationship between the socio-economic position of minorities on the one hand and their socio-cultural position on the other. Recent research shows that the ‘toughening’ of the discourse on immigrant integration and the need for assimilation is also triggering unforeseen effects. Instead of furthering the bridging of social-cultural differences, the discourse on cultural assimilation seems to be contributing to the reification of social-cultural cleavages. Not only has the subjective perception by migrants of their degree of integration decreased, there also seemed to be a growing social-cultural polarization (Entzinger and Dourleijn, 2008; Duyvendak, 2011). In particular the subjective perception of cultural distance between migrants and natives seems to have increased over the past years instead of decreased, in contrast to many indications that socio-economic distance has declined.



Second, there have also been many instances of frame-conflicts *within* these periods. Rather than there being just one dominant frame or ‘model’ of integration, Dutch public and political discourse seems characterized by a multiplicity of frames. Whereas in specific periods there were more or less dominant frames, there have constantly been powerful alternative frames and policy advocates challenging the prevailing integration frame. In fact, as Entzinger (2006) argues, collisions between multiple paradigms seem to have characterized public and political debate on immigrant integration in the Netherlands already since the early 1980s, showing that there has not been one Dutch model, but at least two constantly rivalling discourses on immigrant integration. Especially, the liberal-egalitarianist (or universalist) frame of immigrant integration seem to have emerged much earlier in the Netherlands, well before it became the dominant policy frame in the 1990s. Already in 1979, in its report to government that provided the basis for the Ethnic Minorities Policy, the Scientific Council for Government Policy rejected the idea of creating new ‘pillars’ for newcomers. ‘Preservation of own identity’ needed to be replaced by a more active encouragement of minorities to participate in Dutch society (WRR, 1979, p. xxi). Furthermore, when the term ‘multi-cultural’ was used in Dutch integration discourse, this was only in a descriptive sense to coin the increasing ethnic diversity of Dutch society, but not with the normative connotation that we attribute to it today (Vink, 2007, p. 344).

As already mentioned, in the late 1980s, well before the turnover towards Integration Policy in the 1990s, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 1989) went even further in proposing a liberal-egalitarianist alternative to the Ethnic Minorities Policy. The report denounced the multiculturalist policy approach as ineffective, and asked for policy change towards a more individual-focused socio-economic approach. Both the content and the ‘tone’ of this report triggered fierce controversy, also within the scientific community. It would take several years before it would see policy changes in the direction it had suggested.

What is important is that this controversy shows that there was, already in this early stage, a powerful counter-discourse to the ‘multicultural model’ – and the alleged protagonists of this model claimed that they themselves said farewell to the multicultural model already in 1979!

Another conflict of paradigms took place just after the turn of the Millennium. Fuelled by debate on the ‘multicultural tragedy’ in 2000, the public unrest that followed the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, and the rise of the populist politician Pim Fortuyn who was murdered on the eve of national elections (2002), immigrant integration had returned on the political agenda. Many political parties now denounced the policies that had been conducted thus far as a failure. In this explosive setting,



parliament established an *ad hoc* parliamentary investigative committee, the Blok Commission (named after its chairman Stef Blok from the Liberal Party) to find out why the integration policy had failed and to offer proposals for a more successful integration policy.

In its report, 'Building Bridges', the Blok Commission concluded that immigrant integration had in fact been a 'total or partial success' (Blok, 2004, p. 105). The evidence of progress in education and labour supported this conclusion. These findings contrasted sharply with the negative tone of public and political debate on immigrant integration. The commission was criticized for introducing a bias in its findings by focusing on socio-economic facets and disregarding cultural and religious aspects of immigrant integration. Its evaluation of immigrant integration revealed deeper disagreements about the framing of immigrant integration. As a result, rather than resolving the ongoing controversies, the commission instead became itself the target of controversy. Although many of its instrumental recommendations were eventually adopted by parliament, its most fundamental conclusion about the success of the integration process was widely and often strongly rejected.

At the heart of this controversy was a collision between different policy frames. The Blok Commission adopted a paradigm of integration that stressed socio-economic participation, resembling the dominant policies of the Integration Policy in the 1990s. In contrast, many public intellectuals and political parties had embraced a more (mono)culturalist paradigm of integration.

### **The persistent image of Dutch multiculturalism**

Our analysis repudiates the idea of a singular, coherent and consistent Dutch multicultural model. Yet, how can we then understand the persistent image that there is one dominant multicultural 'model' in the Netherlands? One possible explanation is that there is more continuity in actual policy practices than in political and policy discourse. This means that the discontinuity in (official) policy frames has not entirely trickled down to the levels where these formal paradigms are implemented. Indeed, there is evidence that some policy practices that were initiated in the 1980s were continued until well after the multicultural policies of the Minorities Policy had been formally abandoned. For instance, Immigrant Language and Culture Instruction continued until after the turn of the Millennium. However, whereas its goal was initially formulated as contributing to identity formation of migrants within the Dutch multicultural society, its rationale was reframed in the 1990s in terms of 'language-transition' by first mastering the mother-tongue language as



support for the subsequent apprehension of Dutch as second language. Another activity that was continued until well after the 1980s, was the institutionalized practice of consultation with migrant organizations. At first, the establishment of migrant organizations and a National Consultatory and Advisory Structure for Minorities had the objective of democratically involving migrants in policy-making processes. In the 1990s, the institutional involvement of migrant organizations was largely continued, although its advisory function was gradually marginalized. More recently, an important rationale for maintaining consultation practices is that migrant organizations provide channels for debate when incidents, such as the murder of the filmmaker Van Gogh, trigger broad public and political controversy. Also in other fields, there are *prima facie* signs of path-dependency, such as in the existence of broadcast media for migrant groups and in the establishment of Islamic schools with state help. However, the meaning and the use of these policies and the opportunities offered to migrants have radically shifted over time.

Another explanation for the persistence of some group-specific policies is of more pragmatic nature. Whereas the discontinuity in national policy discourse was triggered by various focus events and the sharp politicization of immigrant integration over the past decades, the local level – where much of the integration policy is implemented – seems characterized by a more pragmatic mode of problem-coping and a more instrumental policy logic. In this respect, national and local integration policies seem partly to have followed different policy logics. An important instance of divergence in this respect concerns the recognition of ethno-cultural groups and minorities organizations. In the early nineties, national government formally adopted a more colourblind citizenship-approach, approaching migrants as citizens rather than as ethnic or cultural groups. This citizenship approach meant that various group-specific, tailor-made projects would have to be abolished. Yet, in practice, there has been a continuity of such group-specific projects (see De Zwart, in this volume). Often, there is a pragmatic need for policy practitioners to focus on specific groups and cooperate with migrant organizations, to be able to ‘reach’ the policy target groups and to acquire relevant knowledge and information about these groups (Poppelaars and Scholten, 2008; see also Uitermark *et al.*, 2005).

Although these local practices often imply the de-facto recognition of cultural groups, it would be a mistake to consider them as deliberate multicultural policies. Rather, they form more pragmatic attempts to conduct effective policies on the local level. They show that the ‘citizenship-approach’ that emerged in the 1990s also did not institutionalize as a coherent policy model. Neither the multicultural paradigm of the 1980s nor the citizenship approach of the 1990s became a true ‘national model’.



## Conclusions

In this article, we have located and deconstructed the supposed Dutch multicultural model of integration. Our analysis shows that the Dutch approach to immigrant integration is quite persistently referred to in terms of a multicultural model within national as well as international literature. These claims of a Dutch multicultural ‘model’ are based on a linear idea of continuity and coherence in (Dutch) policies. However, our historical reconstruction of Dutch policies shows that in fact there has been very little continuity in the development of these policies over the past three to four decades. In formal policy discourse, a different type of approach emerged once in every decade or so. Especially, the beliefs concerning the relation between the social-cultural of migrants and their socio-economic position have changed dramatically. Whereas in the 1980s, socio-cultural emancipation was believed to be a positive condition for socio-economic participation, over the past decade social-cultural distinctiveness has come to be considered an obstacle to socio-economic participation.

In addition to the overestimation of continuity, the ‘modellers’ behind the Dutch multicultural model also have to over-exaggerate pluralist practices in the Netherlands in order to claim the coherency of this model. However, on the local level many instances of group specific measures tend to be driven by more pragmatic concerns of problem-coping rather than by an ideology of multiculturalism. Recognizing cultural groups is often more a means for conducting effective integration policies than an attempt to institutionalize diversity. In addition, there are many instances where elements of the alleged multicultural model never reached the stage of effective implementation. For instance, both Sniderman and Hagendoorn and Koopmans and his colleagues suggest that affirmative action, one of their main indicators of a multicultural model, has been an important tool in both the private and the public sector to enhance the labour market situation of migrants. However, in practice affirmative action has been highly controversial, the effective implementation of priority hiring of migrants has been rare and laws for monitoring the (lack of) progress of migrant participation in the work force have even been abolished.

The legacy of pillarism is often referred to as key element of both the continuity and the coherency of the Dutch multicultural model of immigrant integration. For instance, Koopmans argue that ‘to an important extent, the extension of multicultural rights to minorities in the Netherlands is based on the heritage of pillarization’ (2005, p. 71). However, equating the pillarized institutional heritage with policies intentionally developed by successive generations of politicians seems to turn a blind-eye to the rapid changes in Dutch society after the 1960s. In fact, in contrast to claims of pillarist



continuity, the Dutch government was not willing to finance religious self-organizations of migrants (apart from, since 1983, activities of an explicitly non-religious but socio-cultural nature). In the first place, this had to do with the diminishing importance of religious organizations in a depillarizing country and the acknowledged separation of church and state. In the second place, there was an idea that religious organizations were perhaps the least well equipped to form a 'bridge' to society (see Maussen, in this volume).

Whereas the academic modelling of the Dutch approach to immigrant integration depicts the Netherlands as a country that values pluralist concepts of citizenship, it is the exact opposite that has occurred. Since the 1990s, Dutch politicians are becoming less willing to make room for cultural differences. In fact, they are very critical about the pluralist institutional framework that still exists as a consequence of the era of pillarization.

The image of the Netherlands as a liberal, neutral (or even multicultural) country that has been confronted with the limits of its own 'tolerance' is only partially correct. As argued above, integration policies at large never emphasized religious identities. Moreover, the maintenance of whatever kind of 'original' identities was already disregarded in the late 1980s. That 'culture' is given so much attention today is not because of a Dutch appreciation of 'culturally *pluriform* policies' but rather precisely the opposite: as far as the majority population is concerned, the Netherlands has rapidly become culturally homogeneous and more *uniform* (Tonkens *et al.*, 2010).

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