

More '*nonsense upon stilts*' ? *Dead-end* pathways of neoliberal thought; the '*debate*' on neoliberalism as a *rearguard* action

(A response to Robert Fletcher – WUR, and others)

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Abstract

Neoliberal policies are continued unabatedly and shamelessly in many countries, as if despite all the destruction that has been done nothing could harm the protagonists and propagandists. On the other hand, the more problematic the continuation of neoliberalism as a policy ideology becomes, the more articles appear from scholars proclaiming that neoliberalism 'as such does not exist', or at least that the economic (market) policies pursued should *not be subsumed under this heading*. Many researchers such as anthropologist Fletcher (Wageningen University, WUR, the Netherlands) and others believe that a 'debate' is needed on the proper positioning of the term «neoliberalism». By doing so, they (implicitly) indicate that in academic circles there is quite a lot going on concerning ideological positioning in relation to the (pretended) academic 'neutrality' and independence which is so indispensable for free and well-founded scientific practice. Despite the fact that there are often - and many - references to (a selection of) available relevant literature, it appears that the references are often placed in a (too) narrow framework, as a result of which the purport of critical considerations in particular is violated and lost. But as Jeremy Bentham has put it, 'nonsense upon stilts' offers no insight and even less perspective. This (apparent) contradiction between policy implementation and ideological policy criticism indicates that in academic circles there is a good deal of 'blind spot' surrounding the *practical ideological consequences*, from which one seems to be hiding rather than openly facing up to these major issues and including them in analyses and reflections. In order to bring some balance into this, we will subject some of the core arguments put forward to closer scrutiny and see to what extent they really make sense. We shall demonstrate that this is less the case than is pretended and will show where reasoning fails. We will outline that many actual questions and (institutional) problems are to be traced back to the way in which, next to economical reasoning and views, political-philosophic debates on parallel matters such as concepts of choice, success, health and well-being are being performed. This paper presents a critical position that can be taken towards mainstream views concerning some key-findings on neoliberal welfare and austerity-policy that have been dominant

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during recent years and before. In order to see to a feasible change in this respect, some perspectives offered may appear worth considering.

Introduction and outline

Many societies are being confronted with a profound economic, administrative and meaningful malaise in a broad cultural sense, which is largely caused by neoliberal (policy) concepts. Nevertheless, a big *ideological silence* is carefully maintained in order not to disrupt the (often shaky) status quo. This is not only remarkable, it also turns out to be rather paradoxical, if not problematic. However the (tempting) recent tendency to attribute this malaise to crisis-phenomena such as the corona-pandemic or various kinds of financial setbacks because of political expediency, turns out to be shortsighted and untenable in a rather artificial and bolstered up attempt to return to the 'normalty' of everyday reality. Once again, people are confronted with issues and dilemmas that are much more linked to former political choices than many policymakers would like to admit. This also applies even more to the ongoing environmental and climate (change) debates. The neoliberal ideological *caesura* in policy-change that was pushed through in many Western European societies some forty years ago, cannot simply be disguised, disregarded or hidden away. Even if one tries to present this historical fault line as a 'natural' or 'necessary' and even 'unavoidable' process that would not have been based on highly debatable policy choices. Nothing could be further from the truth, as for quite some time now can be observed to the full and which therefore (also in retrospect) appears to be undeniable. This requires closer aggravated specification and explication to be able to disentangle the many problems involved.

Firstly we will memorize what the neoliberal ideology encompasses, together with an overview of some key aspects of the historical context involved (**section one: on defining neoliberalism**); then we shall take environmental fundamentalism as an example of an ongoing debate regarding a *technocratic-neoliberal* way of addressing social issues (**section two: environmental fundamentalism**); subsequently we shall examine in which *apolitical* manner macro- and socio-economic questions are reduced to *individual behaviour* (**section three: directing one's own pathways**), by which we will also address the issue of *state intervention and the market*, as well as *neoliberal economics and the democratic system* and the problem of *stakeholder-democracy versus financial shareholder-capitalism* (i.e. the question of *superordination and subordination*). We will conclude with a brief consideration of the ideological 'sound of silence' and will raise the question to what extent there can be meaningful alternatives in all of this (**section four: vanitas and fidelitas**). Ultimately the matter of 'historical amnesia' is addressed (**section five: problematic realism and poorly developed self-reflection**).

1 | On defining neoliberalism

The key issue that is put to the question by Fletcher and others is about (supposed gaps, or misunderstandings in) defining ideologies such as neoliberalism. ¹ Now much has been published on this subject, but not always in a balanced (consistent) sense. What is supposed to pass as 'objective' turns out, on closer inspection, to be frequently biased. It is good thing that Fletcher has put things in order, but Mr. Fletcher is clearly not acquainted with my work, otherwise he would have known that neoliberalism has been extensively and thoroughly examined in all its facets and clearly defined as a *counterproductive* and *regressive* ideology that has become dominant in policy making and governmental positioning over the last decades. Nevertheless, neoliberal politicians and neoliberal-oriented researchers do not like the term «neoliberalism». They believe – wrongly, incidentally – that this is a 'container concept' which does not 'correctly' address the current neoliberal social order. On the one

hand this is understandable, since acknowledging that such an order exists would be tantamount to undermining or denying their position. That is why people are winding themselves up in many different ways in order to 'prove' that there is a 'confusion of tongues' in this matter. The central thesis posited is that the (neoliberal) policy pursued would contain elements of divergent (ideological) orientations which would not justify a reference under the heading of 'neoliberal', but would negate it. Now it is undeniable that there are such 'divergent elements', but that does not yet mean that the proposition elaborately put forward is correct.

It is clear that it is of utmost importance how one *defines* the notion of neoliberalism and that this requires proper *positioning*, as «critical» means not only (or just) to 'survey, classify and categorize', but above all to analyze '*with the purpose to enlighten*' (Habermas). But then that 'enlighten' must be clearly on the nebula, otherwise it remains a 'non-committal' exercise without direction or meaning.

However, this importance of definition is often taken for a ride, while the (comprehensive) ideology of neoliberalism has been researched and named with great precision to the full (Van der Kooij 2020).² The 'debate' that is currently being conducted therefore appears to be a rearguard action that suggests that the implemented (neoliberal) governance and policy would be a 'reasonable alternative' that would be appropriate for 'modern' societies. This is pure nonsense. It is not a 'damping down of capitalism' as once supported and carried out by the social democratic order, but (regressive) *marketcapitalism pur sang*. Although there are still *mixed economic systems* (to which, incidentally, remarkably little reference is made), that does not mean that the *market-government relationship* is sufficiently balanced everywhere. Certainly not under neoliberal rule. Apparently there is great difficulty in realizing and acknowledging that neoliberalism as a societal concept of administrative and social-economic arrangement, regulation and planning is doomed in view of all the (institutional) destruction it has caused in the past decades. This is painful. Not only for the researchers in question, but especially for the affected citizens who are still confronted with the disconcerting consequences of this ideology. As long as people believe that the state can (continue to) withdraw and leave the public domain to the market, they are on a wrong track. It is the final denial of everything that is 'political' and comes under the heading of *political responsibility*. A 'deconstructivist' approach to social issues by which historical developments are reduced to a 'panopticum of interchangeable ideas' (Foucault et al.) and which reference is made remarkably often, is characteristic of this kind of 'corrective' exercises that are being executed and marketed. Such contrived 'curveballing' serves no social purpose whatsoever, but amounts to a 'tacit' endorsement of the disruptive and disintegrating marketing and management thinking with which neoliberals have been trying to make a name for themselves for years and years.

In short, '*unverfroren*' (market) ideology that very wrongly embraces and praises the policy-based *status quo*. Anyone who looks at this status quo in all its economic and administrative facets, and assesses it on its merits cannot but conclude that neoliberal market thinking has failed completely and that the short-sighted *assumptions* on which it is wrongly based have brought unnecessary misery upon citizens and societies. The 'deliberately' but nonetheless carelessly propagated 'individualism' (or what should pass for it) has completely messed up the *solidarity* on which the model of the institutional welfare state (rather: *social security state*) was based and allowed the public sector to erode. The unbridled *commercial exploitation of public services* has resulted in an unprecedented barrenness. This was not 'progress', but pure *regression*. Those who define correctly do not need to wriggle into self-created corners and do a greater service to society than is demonstrated by this kind of 'shadowy grandstanding'. We will explain and exemplify this position.

Historical roots of neoliberalism and consequences of neoliberal policy

The premature euphoria concerning free market-capitalism that already existed during the early post-war era in which it was (rather carelessly) supposed that free markets would *by definition* 'automatically' advance life chances, living standards and overall well-being, appeared to be rather biased and shortsighted. Although the Western liberal model was supposed to be a «*fait accompli*» according to the *Atlantic vainqueurs* (Milan conference 1955) ³, this would be proven to be merely based on wishful thinking.

The displayed attitude towards the new – decolonizing – *multipolair* geopolitical order (although during the *Cold War* era as well as until the present day this order still would be considered as foremost remaining *bipolair*) was not only highly premature, but mainly showed an *overestimation* by Western (American) powers and its supposed capacity to sustain such powers over time. However it was foremost ignored that (1) goal-orientated *policy* by an *intervening* state is foremost needed to see to a balanced institutionalisation of living conditions and equal (proportional and effective) distribution of income, wealth and social security, while (2) institutional *welfare states* still had to be constructed at the time (as yet still in the U.S.) ⁴

Right-wing parties that appealed to the pre-war economic system and especially the ideas of *ordoliberalism* (Von Mises; Von Hayek et al.) that emerged, did not show much interest in such constructions, as they were supposed to hamper the free market in an unwanted way. As a consequence of the later *crisis of the (social-democratic) left*, this conservative (and as it appeared to be *reactionary*) opposition got wings with *New Public Management* in which the constructed (be it pursued) balance between state, government and the market was discharged. ⁵ After that, (established) institutional developments went downhill quickly, not only regarding *public administration*, but also concerning the *public sector* and lawful constitutional citizenship as such. This affected especially Western European societies that had constructed *welfare states* based on *institutionalized social security systems*. Until the present day rather devastating consequences are noticeable in various key-domains such as the labourmarket, social security system and healthcare (as our forementioned research reveals extensively and detailed).

The political-philosophical and economic origins of neoliberalism and its development as a dominant ideology and doctrine over time can be conceptualised schematically as follows:

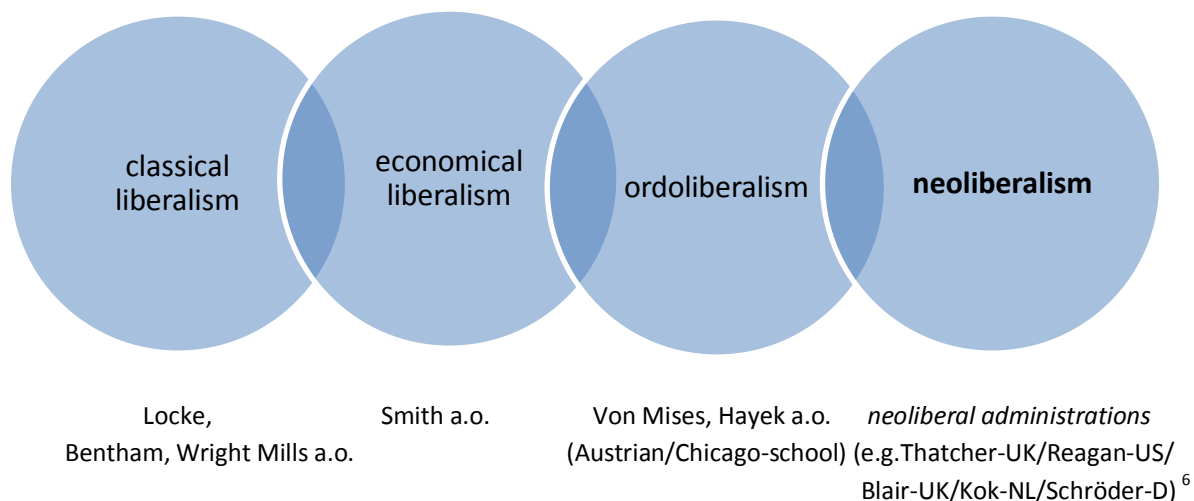


Fig.1 Successive models of liberalism and their protagonists

Explanation of fig. 1

The original concept of (political) **liberalism** positioned citizens (as *citoyens*) as sole *holders of political sovereignty* and contested the model of feudal hierarchy and absolutism. Later on this classical

liberalism was shaded by *market-economic* notions about the (desired) order of societies, in which state and government had to play a minor role in order to give way to entrepreneurial and industrial developments as in earlier (pre-industrial) times during the era of mercantilism. With 20th century 'ordo'-liberalism (of the *Austrian* and subsequently *Chicago-school*) this central idea was pushed even more further and seen as a *panacea* for almost every 'malady and evil' in society. '*Pursuit of happiness*' would be generated by rigid market-concepts only ('roll back the State'). Later on these views were incorporated in *New Public Management* (NPM) in which the state is mainly seen as a 'burden and an evil' for 'real progress'.⁷

With the rise of NPM, as well as *monetarism*, *deconstructivism* and (institutionally fragmented) *behavioural economics*, the models of liberalism and corporatism **merge** towards the dominant ideology of **neoliberalism**. *Anti-statism* and an overall *market-oriented perception* in which *citizens* primarily are seen as 'autonomous' consumers and clients binds the two together. This 'post-modernism' points to a rather problematic development of *modernity* (see fig. 2)

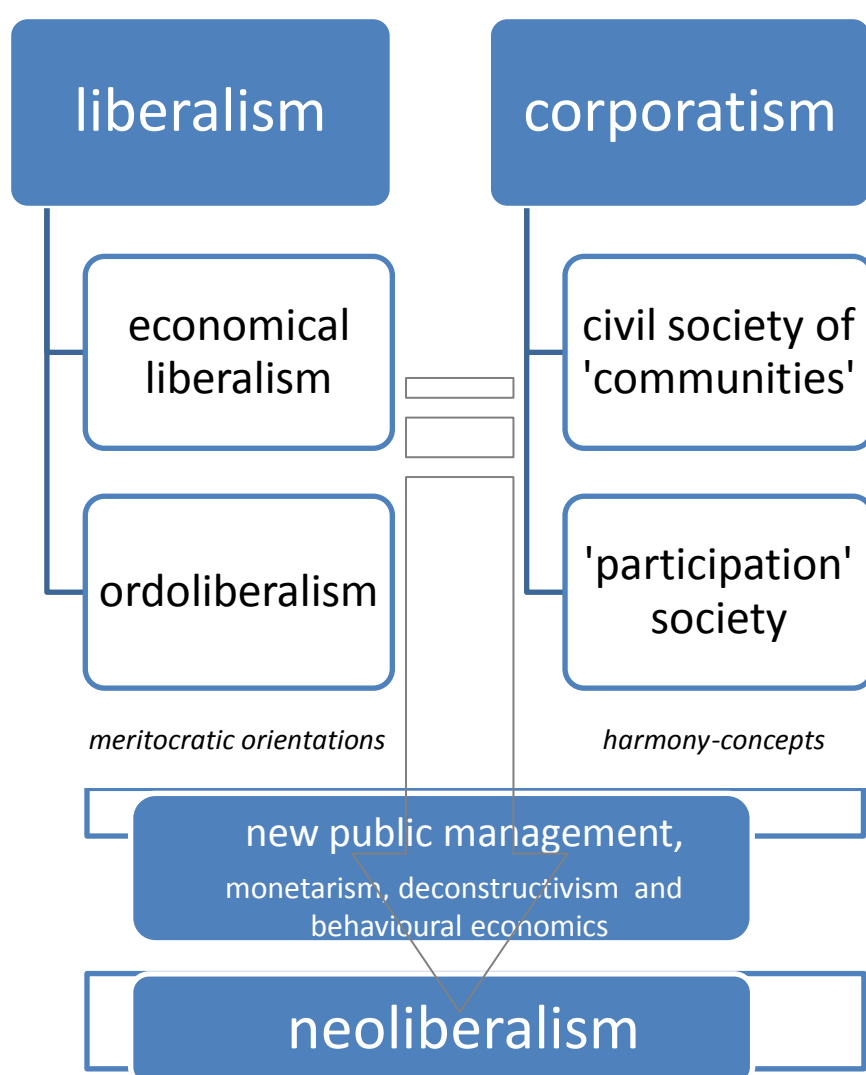


Fig. 2 The historical merging of successive models of liberalism and corporatism that resulted in New Public Management and the dominant model of neoliberalism

Explanation of fig. 2

The central idea of **corporatism** in which an '*organic*' view towards society is supported, is very much attached to Christian and feudal notions about relations between rulers and subjects. The keyword is 'cooperation' (i.e. *concerted action*) to which all subjects are supposed to be inclined and/or submitted. It represents foremost a harmonious model in which contrastive and conflicting interests are seen of minor consequence, as the 'willingness to cooperate' is supposed to bind subjects together. State-functions are seen as 'additional' at the most (as in economic and ordoliberalism). In this view 'communities' are the heart of society, and civilian 'participation' (i.e. participation within the labour-market) is seen as the key to progress and (individual) 'success' (emancipation).

The Canadian historian Ignatieff of the Central European University in Budapest could not have been more wrong when he addressed the Dutch Scientific Council (WRR) with a lecture on pluralism in open societies, in which he posed that "the state is, *thanks to the neoliberal revolution* [sic], less strong and interventionist than it was since 1945" [italics mine]. Nevertheless Ignatieff advocates a 'strong state', meaning "a state that creates equal conditions for all citizens" and "which is built on strong institutions." ⁸ The confusing contradiction about the question what the state *is or should be* can hardly be more entangling. This appears also to be the case with *corporatistic* based 'civil society'-concepts and evolving notions about citizenship that are advocated in many contemporary policy proposals. Constitutional and political citizenship seems to be submerged by local community-concepts with keywords such as 'empowerment', 'capabilities', 'innovation' and 'sustainability'. A myriad of policy-concepts and recommendations point in this direction. So, what is neoliberalism exactly?

Contradictory to popular views neoliberalism is not a loose set of 'free-floating' (liberal) thoughts on markets, entrepreneurial innovation, marketing and so on, as it does not only have *economical* but also serious *governmental* and *institutional* consequences concerning the constitutional state. Therefore advocated institutional polity-change has to be surveyed in order to grasp these consequences to the full. To this end we have to look not only at the market-economy, financial capitalism and the exploitation of workers and resources, but especially at the overall *fragmentation of governmental management* (privatization; decentralization), the *disbalanced 'social contract'* between state, government and citizens, the so called '*sell out*' of the public sector and *problematic citizenship* as well. However in contradiction to the statements on neoliberalism of Sterling-Folker (et al.) ⁹ there does not seem to be academic or political consensus of what this ideology encompasses. As said before, neoliberals, for obvious reasons, dislike using the term 'neoliberal' because they reject being part of an ideology that puts economic market concepts above societal issues of regulation. Apparently their mainly *anti-statist* (be it *corporatistic*) views and beliefs must be minimized to a level that should obscure this regressive and neoconservative set of political orientations. That is why they prefer to speak of a 'conglomerate of ideas', rather than to allow this ideology to be pointed out on its merits. That is also why rather 'euphoric' notions about successes of international cooperation that are supposed to derive from free market principles are put in focus to 'compensate' for the shortcomings and failures of neoliberalism. ¹⁰ Although neoliberalism encompasses a (historical) variety of political and economic conceptions as pointed out, defining neoliberalism does not so much appear to be a problem among its rightful 'criticasters', but must foremost be attributed to a *messing up of orientations* among its advocates who neglect the historical roots of this ideology. When considering this variety of anti-statist elements such as (rigid) market-orientations and the embracement of exploitative financial capitalism, the tacit acceptance of a disbalanced social contract, together with the 'sell-out' of the disrupted public sector and the parallel eroding of *political* citizenship and civic rights, the overall ideology of neoliberalism should be defined as follows:

neoliberalism encompasses a combination of economic-liberal and conservative ideological ('civil society') concepts, in which a dominant set of market mechanisms is deemed to constitute the *defining normative conditions* for the embedding of socio-economic and administrative public policies, and in which *the pursuit of balance between the state and the market domain is discharged* in favor of market interests. The constitutional *social contract* between the State and its citizens is considered marginal, or at least seen as subordinate to these interests.

With this formulation we have pointed out that neoliberalism as a political-economic doctrine thus encompasses an *economic* model as well as a model of *governmental management*, and *changes* the equilibrium that has been pursued with the construction and foundation of the 'welfare state' (as said before, rather: *social security-state*) within mixed economies. This polity change towards this equilibrium appears merely at the cost of *public services* (Mazzucato 2011). According to Bourdieu (1998) this doctrine comprehends 'a programme for destroying collective structures that may impede the pure market logic.' This ideology is therefore in Bourdieu's view by definition (cynically) *destructive*.¹¹ Also: 'the neoliberal programme draws its social power from the political and economic power of those whose interests it expresses: stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, conservative or social-democratic politicians who have been converted to the reassuring layoffs of *laissez-faire* (...)'.

¹² A further paradox occurs however with the mingling of (neo)liberal and communal civil society-concepts, as the *position of the individual* hereby may seem to be interpreted freely in rather diverging ways. On the one hand citizens are seen as more or less 'autonomous' individuals who have to try, or rather are able, to serve their personal interests by employing *supposed* facilities and possibilities ('capabilities') as optimally as possible, such as emphasized in neoliberal-*meritocratic* views and concepts. On the other hand the individual is seen as a socially embedded citizen with linked social 'responsibilities and obligations', which is stressed by community and civil society-protagonists such as Walzer, Dewey, MacIntyre, Taylor, Etzioni, Putnam a.o. (cf Morrice 1996).¹³

Such claims are based upon hardly any realistic, but rather illusive viewpoints concerning a just and effective *institutional organisation* of state and society and the required *functional obligations of the state* in order to effectuate *lawful entitlements* of all citizens, while at the same time a unilateral focus on individual citizen's 'duties' and 'capabilities' to manage their interests in a rigid market-economy is falsely advocated (see following sections). Citizens have basically one duty: to respect the democratic constitutional law and to pay their (fair share of) taxes. All the rest is less relevant than it is pretended. 'Community-building' requires foremost *institutional coherence*, no moralistic propaganda that continues a status quo which harms and obstructs citizen's needs and societal progress.¹⁴

Although the existence as well as the advocated 'successes' of neoliberalism are widely considered as 'self-evident', there are quite some underlying and practical problems that accompany (and derive from) this ideology. As said before, a myriad of (merely too little –thoroughly– contested) assumptions that are (still) put forward are taken for granted, in spite of many ill (that is *unbalancing, fragmenting and dislocating*) consequences of executed neoliberal policy. We will therefore survey some of its problematic key-notions (continued on next page).

Within the ideology of neoliberalism the following problematic key-issues are at stake:

i. In general – *The anti-statist and oligopolistic pathway*

'Free markets will set free the creative potential and entrepreneurial spirit', as advocates of market capitalism such as Hayek (1973) and Rothbard ([1962/1970] 2004) have emphasized systematically, while referring to a so called 'spontaneous [i.e. an 'organic'] order of societies that leads to individual liberty and well-being'.¹⁵ This classical liberal vision of how societies function *economically* is however accompanied by neoliberals and civil society-adepts alike, with further claims concerning the 'disadvantages' of *distributional state-intervention* and the supposed adverse consequences for 'rightful' *citizenship* in general. Many of these lines of thought are to be found in the basic concepts of *New Public Management* as promoted by Osborne & Gaebler (1992).¹⁶

When promoting minimal state-functions and a 'minimal welfare state', whereas social security conditions are mainly left to private and civil parties (such as commercial insurance companies and privatised organisations), citizens are left to the (greedy) hands of proliferated *entrepreneurs* who will primarily be focused on *equity-outputs*. Efficiency, 'customer-fit' and education of costs arguments therefore turn out to be non-realistic. Also a supposed reduction of bureaucratic 'red tape' will not be realised, for an increasing amount of procedural rules and regulations appears to be needed in order to safeguard such equity-goals. For a while market-competition may lead to lower prices for customers at first (sight), but will finally result in *oligopolistic concentration of financial and economic power*. Increases of civil tax-payments will be needed as big(ger) – mainly foreign – companies are often partially or fully excluded from tax-duties (such as in the Netherlands as a tax haven). A shift of public expenditure to individual citizens and households to compensate for lacking governmental assets has, at it shows, severe consequences for the costs of living and living-standards in general. Especially for the lesser paid The findings of the OECD, CBS, Badir, Bolhuis, Salverda as well as those of others such as Jacobs), all point to structural shortcomings in the fiscal and socio-economic policy pursued (see box 1).

Box 1 | Wealth distribution: income, taxes and costs of living (some salient indices and indicators)

The (net) **income gap** between rich and poor appears to have **increased** during the period 1977-2013 in the Netherlands with **39%** (Salverda 2014).

Research by the OECD also shows that in the Netherlands the **inequality in wealth distribution** after the US is the **largest** of all the OECD countries studied. This means, among other things, that **60%** of the lowest-paid households in the Netherlands have financial obligations that generally exceed their income capacity (OECS 2018).

Disposable **household income** has barely increased since 1977 and has *lagged far behind economic growth*. Since 1990 in particular, significant trend breaks have occurred due to the neoliberal policy turn. On the other hand, there has been a **sharp decline** in corporate tax since the 1980s (Badir 2018).

The development of the **tax burden** is problematic (and moreover, is *not in line with researched election promises*). The amount of taxes and contributions was **three times the EU average** between 2007 and 2017 (Bolhuis 2018).

Conclusion: 'On balance it appears that in the Netherlands the [tax] revenues from the function of labor increased more sharply than the revenues from the function of capital'. Also: 'the *collective tax increase*, or a tax reduction that is less than promised, is *almost entirely at the expense of households*, that is to say private taxpayers. This is largely due to the fact that since 1986 the **costs on labor and income** have been on average 3.3 billion *higher* than promised in campaigns.' (Bolhuis *ibid.*)→ continued on next page

ii. State provisions and services: *commodities and merit-goods*

Besides basic economic-liberal notions on commercial entrepreneurial freedom within markets, liberal ideologies also hold views on how distribution and allocation of commodities and *merit goods* should be organised. Distribution of services and redistribution of income within institutionalised welfare state-provisions and arrangements are mainly seen as 'counter-productive' and (too) costly (i.e. 'luxurious' and therefore practically superfluous). These arrangements were considered to be too vulnerable for 'freeriding and freeloading'.

Therefore the welfare state (social security-state) is contested and rejected, as advocated with New Public Management.¹⁷

The welfare state (if constructed as a social security-state according to Western European – especially *continental* models – that is) had to be transformed preferably into an 'insurance-state'. (Notably, for antagonists such welfare states were supposed to have enough '*adaptive capability*' [sic] to provide for such desired and supported change) (e.g. Hemerijck 2013 a.o.).

Therefore the concept of a so called 'participation-society' in which corporatistic elements of civil 'self-reliance' are incorporated, has been advised strongly by policymakers over the years to *replace* the former social security-model. As a result the fragmentation and dismantlement of public services was taken up rigorously with extensive *privatisation* of the (institutionalised) public domain. Market-domination is seen as the *optimal* way to provide for 'efficient' welfare and social security-arrangements and to see to an effective way of allocating goods and services for the general interest of citizens and their society. This appears to be founded mainly on unsupported assumptions and expectations (wishful thinking) that are refuted by practical developments and outcomes. In other words these notions have been proven for the greater part to be based on merely false arguments without analyses *ex ante* as stated in various national and international surveys. (Dutch State Council 2009/2010 and Dutch Auditor General 1995/1998. See also Nachtwey 2016; Streeck 2013; Castel 2009/2016, 2011, 2013).

iii. Citizenship

On top of these regressive institutional and social-economic consequences, the way *citizenship* is perceived in neoliberal thought may be even more disturbing when viewed to the full. As Thorsen & Lie write:

'Neoliberalism could also include a perspective on moral virtue: the good and virtuous person is one who is able to access the relevant markets and function as a competent actor in these markets. He or she is willing to accept the risks associated with participating in free markets, and to adapt to rapid changes arising from such participation (Friedman 1980). Individuals are also seen as being solely responsible for the consequences of the choices and

Fiscal pressure appears to be considerable for the Dutch population – mainly because of *stacked (cumulative) taxes*. Citizens therefore do not pay tax once, but many times over and on top of their income and expenditure (such as in addition to income tax, municipal taxes, road tax, VAT and excise duties). On top of this, considerable energy costs and health costs are added. The resulting *reduction in the budgetary space between income and expenditure* is proving to be an increasing problem for households, making it more difficult for many people to make ends meet and meet their financial obligations.

Poverty. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), there were 584.000 households that had to make ends meet with this minimum in 2018 (or **7.9% of all households**). This included **more than 1 million persons**. Of these, **40% were long-term poor** (meaning that these people had a low income for at least 4 consecutive years. It is therefore a structural problem for this group, as the majority of them depend on social assistance (CBS 2019).

1.4 million Dutch households have problematic debts or are at risk thereof (which means that the CBS figure of 1 million is still flattering and that this problem involves many more people).

decisions they freely make: instances of **inequality** and glaring **social injustice** are morally acceptable, at least to the degree in which they could be seen as the result of freely made decisions (Nozick 1974; Hayek 1976). If a person demands that the state should regulate the market or make reparations to the unfortunate who has been caught at the losing end of a freely initiated market transaction, this is viewed as an indication that the person in question is **morally depraved** and **underdeveloped**, and scarcely different from a proponent of a totalitarian state (Von Mises 1962).' [Emph. vdK] ¹⁸

This recap of reactionary notions to which Thorsen & Lie rightfully refer, calls for a profound positioning and addressing of criticism, for citizens in constitutional democratic states don't have to 'prove' to anyone that they 'participate' in a supposed 'right way', as they *constitutionally belong* to society in the first place. Secondly, according to the constitution citizens may (formally) have 'equal' opportunities, this does not mean they have an *equal position in materializing such 'opportunities'*. *Life chances* (Dahrendorf) are not only connected with willingness, but foremost with *facilities and provisions* they do or don't have at their disposal in a sufficient way. To assume that 'by definition' citizens are 'autonomous' in this respect is false. It neglects fundamental issues of **inequality** **and** the *obligations* states and governments have in this respect. Or as Stiglitz has put it pithily: 'inequality is a choice; equality of opportunity our [American] national myth.' ¹⁹ To be able to understand the full impact of this, we willingly memorize Stiglitz' clarification as outlined in the foreword of Polanyi's early prominent work *The Great Transformation* ([1944] 2001):

'Rapid transformation destroys old coping mechanisms, old safety nets, while it creates a new set of demands, before new coping mechanisms are developed. This lesson from the nineteenth century has, unfortunately, all too often been forgotten by the advocates of the Washington consensus, the modern-day version of the liberal orthodoxy.' ²⁰

'The advocates of the neoliberal Washington consensus emphasize that it is government interventions that are the source of the problem; the key to transformation is "getting prices right" and getting the government out of the economy through privatization and liberalization. In this view, development is little more than the accumulation of capital and improvements in the efficiency with which resources are allocated — purely technical matters. This ideology misunderstands the nature of the transformation itself — a transformation of society, not just of the economy, and a transformation of the economy that is far more profound than their simple prescriptions would suggest. Their perspective represents a misreading of history, as Polanyi effectively argues.' [Emph. vdK] ²¹

This historic aberration of perceptions towards economic 'progress' to which Polanyi and Stiglitz refer is also addressed by Krugman where he states:

'The history of economic thought in the twentieth century is a bit like the history of Christianity in the sixteenth century. ... Economic theory at least aspires to be science, not theology; it is concerned with earth, not heaven. Keynesian theory initially prevailed because it did a far better job than classical orthodoxy of making sense of the world around us. ... Friedman's laissez-faire absolutism contributed to an intellectual climate in which faith in markets and disdain for government often trumps the evidence.' [Emph. vdK] ²²

Much is left by neoliberals to rather illusive belief. Therefore presumed outcomes remain largely unattained by the policy-means and mechanisms they advocate. However the impact of this

(economic and *polity*) debate reaches further than merely philosophical theorizing seems to be able to encounter. *Social consequences* of these economical premises appear to be humiliating for citizens and have *disintegrating effects* on society as a whole (see fig. 3). The rather absolutistic connotations of this doctrine can hardly be underestimated as dogmatic beliefs seriously hamper open-mindedness. The closing-in upon open pluralistic and non-dogmatic deliberation is a grave major consequence for all involved. This nailing up does not point to 'consensus' — let alone to justification of the 'theories' involved — , but mainly to insecurity towards positions taken and a rather reluctant attitude towards profound criticism.

Fig. 3 Contraproductive pathways and key-consequences of executed neoliberal policy

Economical

- market-oriented policy under the classical premise of 'an invisible hand' (self-recovering capacity) leads to *oligopolistic* market-dominance
- a 'free competitive market' is an *illusion* as it benefits the economic powerful and pushes away small(er) businesses
- competition leads to a *price-race to the bottom* with serious consequences for the labour-market
- a structural *imbalance between labour and capital* is not to the benefit of labourers and living conditions of citizens
- financial *shareholders-capitalism* disturbs the pursuit towards *human equity*
- clinging on to a *superseded industrial system* only benefits *low-labourcost countries*

Governmental

- *anti-statist management* under the premise that state and society are to be run as 'businesses' leads to a *fragmentation of public government*
- managerial government that favours the market in public domains (privatization) *loses political-directed control*
- it also leads to *depolitisizing* of social issues
- technocratic management with an obsessive focus on 'output-efficiency' procures the undermining and erosion of *service(s), the rule of law and citizenship*
- *formalistic* views and conceptions about the democratic system and (parliamentary) decision-process (*monism*) reduce the one man-one vote system to merely *numeric 'majorities'*, which undermines *legitimation-conditions of legislation*
- the '*social contract*' in which a *functional responsibility-balance for the common good* is pursued between citizens and their state/government becomes disrupted

Societal

- *activities, affairs and objects* that are not '*profitable*' in an economic sense are '*dismissed*'
- *citizens* are reduced to solely *production factors and consumers*; their '*value*' is measured as such
- *individuals* are held '*responsible*' for their own *well-being*
- this leads to *polarization* and *erodes solidarity*
- an '*atomic society*' turns out to be the final result

State intervention and the market: the ambiguity of big business rhetoric

In principle, two contrasting ideal-typical economic ordering models are possible. This dichotomy between a state-led (socialist/communist) and (capitalist) market-economic model has determined geopolitical relations for a long time during the 20th century. With the post-war development of (Western European) *welfare states within mixed economic systems* (Keynes/Beveridge) this dichotomy was indeed broken, but since the collapse of communism as a state-led organizational model, the old market economy model has (again) become dominant. Mixed economic systems have shifted since the 1980s under the influence of anti-statist market views towards the market model as advocated by ordo- and neoliberals alike. Central (balancing) principles that were supposed to regulate the relationship between state, government and market, and that were pursued with the welfare state, were largely abandoned. The market became dominant, as it had done before (see fig.4)

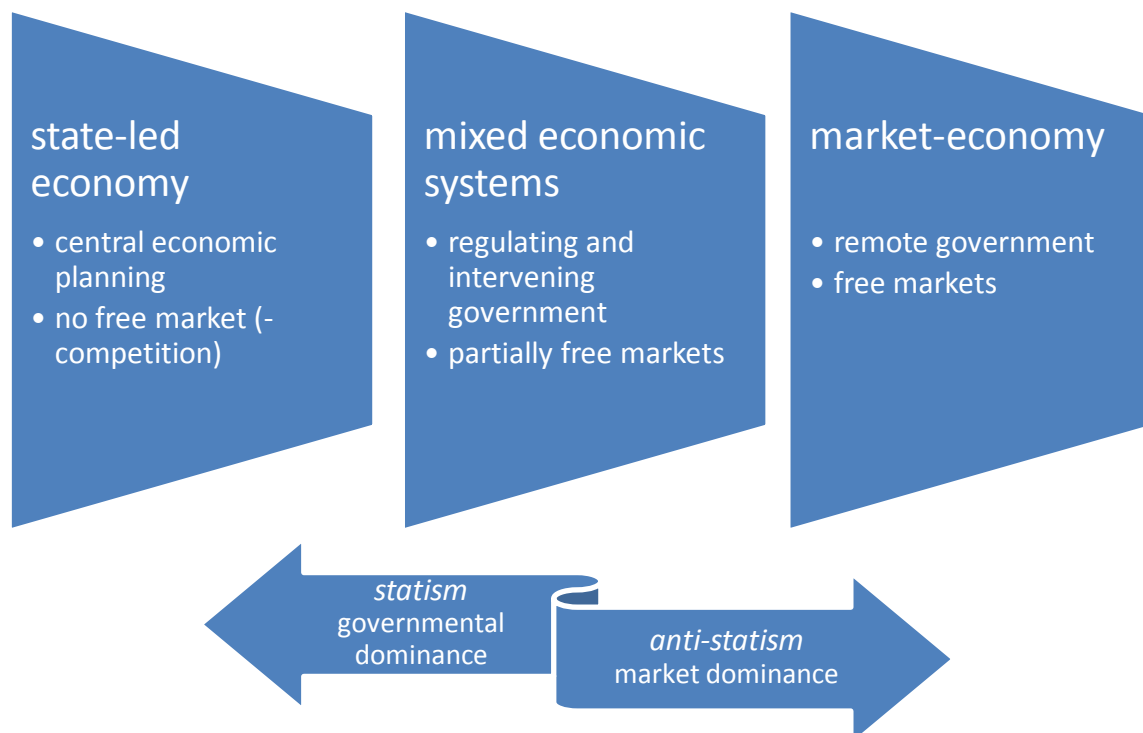


Fig. 4 Dominance, juxtaposition and subordination of state/government and the market

Explanation of fig. 4

Typology of three (ideal-typical) economic models in which the government-market relationship is organized differently. In mixed systems a balance is sought between state / government and market, but this depends on the *dominant politico-economical ideology* that is used to execute and legitimate governmental policy. Mixed systems can therefore shift more to the left (governmental dominance) or to the right (market dominance). A paradoxical development however is that on the basis of *anti-statist* conceptions the economic order can actually show *more statist features*, so that one can speak of *state capitalism* (after 'Chinese' or 'Russian' model). The old dichotomy between 'capitalism' and 'communism' is therefore virtually irrelevant. All societies are more or less organized according to the capitalist model.

Promoting principles of free market competition and profit maximization, while leaning on governmental support and (indirectly to) community assets when business returns are 'disappointing' (or 'less than expected'), amounts to moral ambiguity that characterizes the double-dutch rhetoric (at random) by which *mixed economies* under neoliberal ideology are being viewed and met. Generally speaking the market does not accept the 'burden' (i.e. liabilities of) governmental interference, but is

often willing and greedy enough to appeal to the financial 'solidarity' of the community when this seems convenient. This is especially the case with large stocklisted companies where CEO's on behalf of their shareholders can appeal to special 'arrangements' (such as unequal tax-rulings), as small and medium-sized enterprises hardly have any such options to rely on when they fall short of revenues in a similar way. In short, measuring with two antipodal and rather incompatible standards which erodes mixed economic systems is not the way that serves the public interests in a balanced way, but a *regressive* development. Minimizing (personnel) costs, as in the case of mass layoffs, may lead to substantial rewards ('bonuses') for 'outstanding management performances' to stir up the solvability of companies and the profitable benefits of their investors, despite all window dressing it means unemployment and loss of income for the many. Within such a cynical and too often malicious administrative culture a rigid executing of *cutting edge* performances can only be employed to persons who are 'cut from the right stuff'. That is to say who are willing to please their investors and who care little about corporate social responsibilities. Their 'altruism' exhibited is therefore questionable. Maleficent administrators should not be allowed to settle into comfortable positions with a major social impact and to enrich themselves at the expense of society and their employees. Such persons who think far beyond criticism of any kind, bluntly refuse to admit that their closed-minded conduct is causing untold harm to society. By persisting in such an unassailable 'right' one shows not to have any idea whatsoever of the causes that underlie the question of why all confidence in administrative responsibilities is finally lost.

It is therefore highly questionable whether a (*re*)turn to rigid capitalistic mechanisms, while supposing that 'progressive' moves are being made in respect to social responsibilities – such as 'employment opportunities' (to which regularly is referred in order to legitimate such arrangements) –, are as 'favourable' to citizens as advocated. Cutting wages and social benefits, together with a constant raising of taxes under governmental consent can hardly be regarded as 'progressive'. 'Modern' technocratic management that allows itself to be used for questionable (highly selective) purposes and which shows – just as neoliberal governments employ – to be a rather repressive instrument to 'accommodate' workers, demonstrates hardly anything else than an impertinent *extension* of the capitalistic order that has proven to be exploitative towards human and (institutionalized) social capital. Maintaining an overall ideological 'silence' is therefore in contradiction to the generally upheld idea of 'pragmatic neutrality' unmistakable an although veiled, but intentional calculated political strategy to *conceal, subdue and silence* unwanted opposition. The question however is whether the democratic system can counterbalance such behavior of false pretences effectively to the full.

Neoliberal economics and the democratic system

The practical quality of democracy is always connected to *advocated polity* and *executed policies* and needs therefore to be addressed as such. *'Taking a systemic and long-run perspective, it seems that the once heralded optimism related to democratization and re-democratization of the 1980s and 1990s needs to be reexamined in light of eroding democracy, de-democratization, social exclusion, and growing threats to civil liberties.'* (Nef and Reiter, 2009).²³ Therefore the ideology of neoliberalism has to be contested broadly and not only as an 'indispensable' austerity-program to underline a so called 'adaptive capacity' of welfare states (as mainly, but wrongly supposed in mainstream-research). Although it sometimes is stated that the neoliberal capitalist order was 'embedded' by 'Third Way'-policies, it was exactly the other way around. Third Way-policy *itself* was foremost a neoliberal concept under a false 'progressive' banner that amplified and expanded capitalist market-structures at the cost of *social-economic institutional foundations*. 'Embedded neoliberalism' is therefore a *contra-dictio in terminis*, such as the use of 'adaptiveness' in this context is used euphemistically. The embeddedness which the Dutch *welfare state provided* was increasingly eroded. Although Van Apel-

doorn et al. (2009) use the term 'embedded neoliberalism', they admit that "this erosion is inherent in embedded neoliberalism as a hegemonic project, a project that cannot sustain a genuine embedding of the market as it prioritizes (supranational) market-making policies and the freedom of European and global market forces, over any (national) market-correcting policies and accepts that a transnational neoliberal marketization drive will erode national embeddedness (even if in the shorter run the latter helps to integrate formerly antagonistic social forces into a hegemonic power bloc)." ²⁴ In addition they emphasize that the neoliberal power shift that encompassed "weakened organised labour and the restoration of capitalist class power as well as a shift within the latter class from industrial to financial capital and from national to transnational capital", is also a process that was *institutionalized* through the increasingly *neoliberal* European integration process. ²⁵ In other words neoliberal politics appear to be a *weaker link* to establish real social-economic and social-democratic progress.

Because of *plutocratic and oligarchic practises of unrestricted markets* ²⁶ the democratic system *on the whole* is at stake and appears not only problematic in authoritarian states but in many democratic countries as well. Is is a serious problem for a rightful continuation of the European Union and other international bodies of cooperation such as the United Nations. ²⁷ To be able to 'define and practise equity and freedom' (so it is supposed), more is needed than just maintaining a *formal one man, one vote-system*, for such mechanisms on which legislation is democratically legitimated appears to be based on serious *inequality-mechanisms* that continue rather closed and opaque (political) circuits. ²⁸ In this way the ideology of neoliberalism appears to be *self-fulfilling*. When one approaches the democratic constitutional state with *cynicism* because of selective political and economic power interests, and believes that the government can 'properly' discharge itself from responsibilities with regard to the general interest (foremost the public sector), one should not be surprised that *public confidence* in government and public administration is undermined and that people 'just' turn to the market in despair, as they have little alternatives. Then *anti-statist mistrust* drives policy propagated market concepts even further, so that the circle is closed and the neoliberal 'right' in this respect is systematically confirmed. A very bitter 'right' that polarizes and disintegrates society already for many years. (See fig. 5 on the next page)

(Formal) Democracy

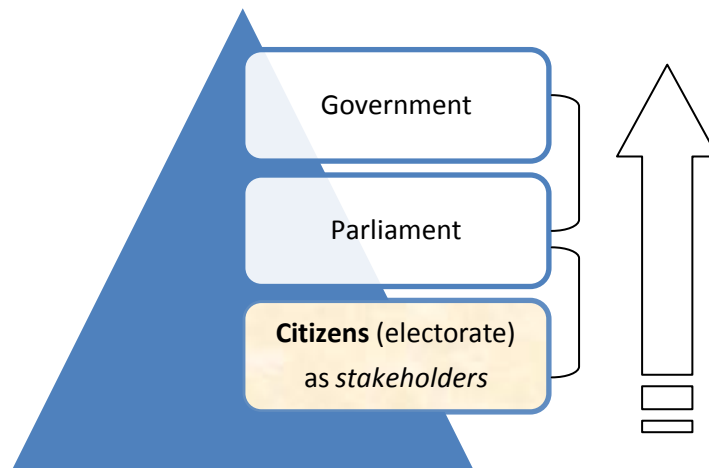


Fig. 5^a Citizens issue (unconditional) electoral *mandates*. Parliament has *political primacy*, the government executes.

State, government and society as a 'private (limited liability) company'

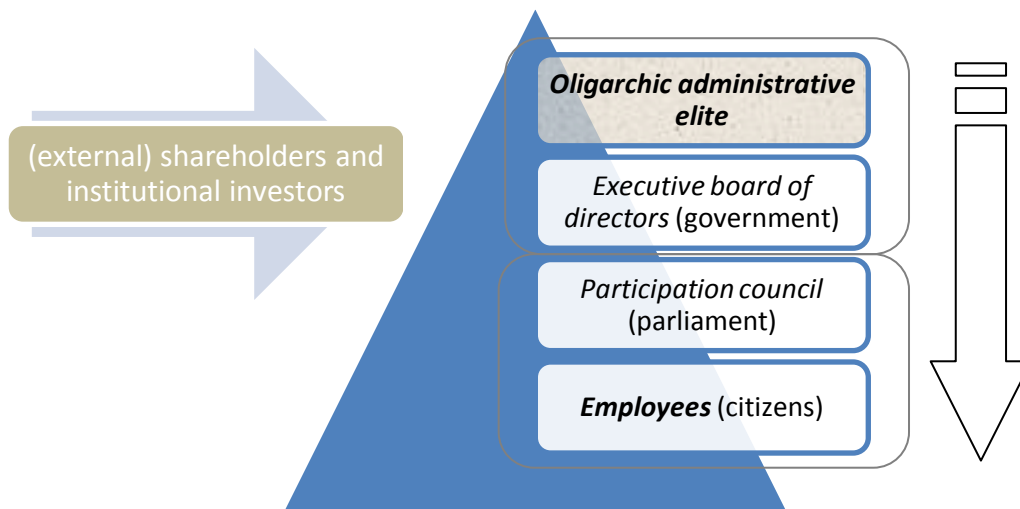


Fig. 5^b The government and society seen as a 'company', which are also run according to business criteria. Not so much the interests of *citizens as stakeholders*, but the *interests of investors* comprise the main focus in this governance model.

Fig. 5^{a/b} The administrative hierarchy of the Netherlands according to the formal-democratic decision-making and technocratic-neoliberal business model

Stakeholder-democracy versus financial shareholder-capitalism

The question of superordination and subordination

The central question is: who are the *real* stakeholders in the political-administrative whole of society? In the **formal decisionmaking-model** of (parliamentary) democracy, the focus is on the granting of *mandates* by the electorate (citizens). This granting of mandates to representatives of the people (actually: to political parties) is, however, *unconditional*. This means that citizens cannot claim the way in which issued mandates are completed and implemented, even if everything is (formally) done *in their name and on their behalf*. The *legitimacy* of legislation and regulations is therefore (in terms of content) fundamentally shaky. This also applies to the *political primacy* for the sake of the general interest, which is and ought to be considered of primary importance. In other words, the position of citizens as *political stakeholders* and actors are crucial, but rather feeble when their position becomes part of political arbitrariness such as in **the model in which the state, government and society are perceived as a 'company'**. In this model the core issue is 'optimization' (maximization) of shareholder returns. This involves both the *superordination* of shareholders' financial interests and the *subordination* of citizens (as employees and taxpayers) to 'the company'. In this model, democracy only serves to legitimize (business) decisions taken (just as works and participation councils mainly serve to approve company decisions). Political primacy is fading into the background.

For a correct understanding: there is nothing wrong with doing business as such. However, the issue remains: *at what cost* ? As said before, tax rulings that are disproportionate pull society out of its seams. Likewise with regard to unbridled subsidies. *Who or what* is being funded with this, one may ask over and over again. For instance institutional investors (pension funds, insurers, banks) are now (2021-22) providing around € 80 billion to finance many governmental support measures related to corona in the Netherlands. This is no 'altruism', but pure calculation in which the bill – as always – is ultimately deposited with the citizen. The spending 'party' will therefore be short-lived.

Cynicism leads to apathy. Citizens are confronted with this more than they would like. Political and policy-cynicism can be illustrated on the basis of two domains that are of essential importance to the 'Netherlands Ltd.', namely international transport and the agricultural (export) sector.

It is said that flying is a must, otherwise the 'national' Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM, although now merged with AirFrance) will run into problems. After all, KLM creates employment. It is therefore a good deed to board planes (as much as possible). As a result the tourist industry will also flourish. On the other hand it is said that flying is bad, because it is harmful to the environment. (So don't). And so on...

This also applies to the *agricultural* sector. The Dutch economy is largely dependent on (agricultural) exports. So 'just produce', while on the other hand the entire sector is under pressure due to environmental and climate concerns. Livestock must be halved; farmers must 'adjust' their production, that is to say drastically limit it. How contradictory can it be and how 'grayish' do people want it ? «Sustainability» seems to be the 'magic' word, but as it appears that this term is used in many senses and for a variety of purposes, the concept becomes virtually meaningless. Such signals are a sure recipe for despair, disorientation and general mistrust. No sensible person can compete with that.

2 | Environmental fundamentalism

Besides ideological aberrations, there are many misconceptions that corrupt a meaningful debate about the dominant neoliberal ideology. Such as the debate about 'sustainable development', in which curious notions of 'sustainability', 'green production', 'precisely deemed climate and environmental policy' and 'energy transition' tumble over one another. We live in a world in which many people

would imagine they have full opportunities and freedom and which would show itself 'open' to them to this end, the reality is in many ways a different one however. Contrary to the prevailing view, *closed and 'introverted'* societies encompass a broader range than merely authoritarian and totalitarian systems alone. Those who observe carefully can see that in this respect *image and reality* are often less corresponding than suggested. The current environmental and climate debate is, as mentioned, a characteristic example of this. We will explain.

Anyone who wants to see the planet 'green' will first have to take off his colored or fogged-up glasses. Only then will it become clear that advocated 'climate neutrality' amounts to illusory wishful thinking that distracts attention from often neglected global existential problems and embraces the (economic) *status quo* more than many people realize, despite all the rhetoric about change. Those who nevertheless continue to believe that 'the market' will solve everything, are not only naive, but also ignorant and short-sighted. For it is precisely the global system of supply and demand that does not behave in the way one would like to see with all the demonstrated wishful thinking. Then we just will (have to) 'regulate' the market, is the subsequent answer. Would we ? Do we really think that this is what neoliberal market adepts mean when they talk about 'meeting climate targets' ? Of course not, the market is being 'cosmetically rigged' in order to remain 'salonfähig' until the end of time. A different order is therefore out of the question and will remain to be so as far as confirmed market-disciples are concerned. And what's more: globalization is less under control than is (implicitly) assumed for the sake of convenience. The *interdependence* – or mutual dependency of states – is simply so intertwined that it is quite preposterous to assume that this development could be reversed. In this respect, one is bound to each other by skin and hair, whether one accepts it or not. Countries may want to set out their own 'road map', but in many respects that map has already been 'coloured in' before they get started. It will prove to be a dead end. (As far as this is concerned, one would probably be better off 'relying on the starry sky', were it not for the fact that that sky is also quite unruly and by no means represents the 'Valhalla' that one imagines it to be. Also nature and the cosmos are in this respect far from a fairy tale, but are often as unpredictable as man himself). As long as people's heads remain in the clouds and one cannot manage to keep one's feet on the ground, an aberrant sense of reality will remain dominant. Not only the 'industrial smoke' will have to disappear, but also the many (self-created) smokescreens, before meaningful action can be undertaken. If we do not even know how to regulate the most *basic* and longlasting *human issues* of poverty and deprivation properly, what do we really expect when it comes to such largely intangible global problems as 'climate' ? A boundless *overestimation* and *underestimation* of possibilities for adequately addressing issues at the same time.

On top of the existing market fundamentalism, *climate fundamentalism* has now emerged as an absolutist 'all-encompassing' ideology that is supposed to legitimize unprecedented *capital transitions*. 'We do what is necessary' and 'what we can', then reads the legitimization for all (proposed) policies in this area. Both statements are false, because they are beside the truth. Successive cabinets and their followers often lack not only purposeful analytical capacity and the necessary realism, but also sufficient independent stature to realize such ambitious plans. Although they seem to want to address this issue *on a global scale*, they leave the direction of (national and international) planning issues mainly to market parties. A more sharply focused approach would enable the underlying factual problems of borderless exploitation to be tackled more adequately, were it not for the fact that the market fundamentalism espoused in this regard forms an almost insurmountable obstacle. This ideology proves itself to be a *primary* stumbling block to this end. So we do not do 'what is necessary' and surely could do much more (and especially *differently*), if at least the willingness were present. This is lacking on all (especially economic) fronts. That is why policy scepticism and distrust does not just 'fall out of the sky'. For example, the nitrogen problem appears to be primarily a (virtual)

accounting exercise, in which the *trading of emission rights* – as with CO₂, ammonia emissions (slurry surpluses) and milk quotas – *ostensibly* puts things 'in order'.²⁹

When one (rightly so, in principle) would believe that if the earth were to go to pieces there would be nothing left to regulate on a world scale, then one creates the implicit suggestion that the current *socio-economic* world problems would in fact be 'secondary'. This is quite a strange figure and can only be explained from a rather arrogant and corrupted Western industrialized perspective where people are mainly concerned with their own affairs and are less concerned with the problems of others in the world. For many people in deprived conditions, then, priorities lie not so much with 'the climate' as with their *actual conditions of existence*. They are, in fact, the ones who suffer most from the current economic constellation and therefore have an interest in other political orientations. And specifically orientations that focus on the *urgency of poverty and inequality issues*. This has been the case for a long time. Longer, in any case, than the embrace of climate fundamentalism. 'Eliminate all poverty and hunger from the world', however, is a slogan one doesn't hear much anymore. After all, NGOs will solve such issues sufficiently, so it is mistakenly believed.

In this context, one might ask to what extent a left or right-wing approach is being advocated and addressed in the climate debate. The *depoliticized technocratic addressing* of this issue by national governments and parliaments is undeniably right-wing, although the 'left-wing repertoire' is invariably used to provide this addressing with (extra) legitimization. That parties on the left do not see through this is remarkable. In this way they are made participants in a policy agenda that has hardly anything to do with left-wing ideals of a just and respectable order. Climate' and 'environment' are, however you look at it, *no apolitical* issues, but concern a conglomerate of far-reaching economic and social interests. Precisely *those* interests that have been at issue since time immemorial, such as the concentration of power, exploitation, waste and the erosion of human dignity and well-being. A state that does not comply with its obligations and responsibilities is not only at the heart of all dissatisfaction and discontent with public administration, but also with regard to (the trust in) policy plans developed around climate and the environment. Society is therefore in urgent need of ideological orientations that do not marginalize citizens and subordinate them to phantom narratives of 'common interest', but that do justice to their central position in society as a whole and respond to it in full. The climate and environment debate is also part of this, provided it is conducted *in its full breadth* and not extremely selectively as is currently the case.

Those who do not understand the neoliberal market ideology to the fullest extent, cannot make correct analyses of *current social problems* either, since many issues are directly or indirectly related to this policy ideology. However, governing neoliberal (coalition) parties seem to live in a different world. The central misconception has long been that if the *market* is given as much free rein as possible a 'just society' will automatically come about. But quite apart from this ideological aberration, there will always be a need to *intervene* in order to achieve workable equilibriums, since such a desired justice is simply not a 'natural given'. Just as the market of supply and demand is not a 'self-governing' system in this respect. This 'invisible hand' does not exist. The Netherlands – no matter how you look at it and despite all the austerity cutbacks – just like many other countries still has a *mixed economic system* in which the government – albeit under neoliberal rule in a fairly minimalist way – plays a role that cannot be ignored. It should be realized that the economy itself is not an end in itself, but a *means to secure the living conditions* of citizens. To declare the economy 'sacred', or elevated above all doubt, scrutiny, or political discussion, is to lay the axe to the root of correct administration and policy.

3 | 'Directing one's own pathways'. Everyone to himself and the market for all ?

On reducing macro-economic and social-economic issues to (individual) behavior(ism) as an apolitical approach of meritocratic 'do-it-yourself' ('happy-go-lucky') concepts

We will continue to elaborate on some more key-notes of neoliberal ideological thought. As stated in our outline the claims involved encompass *economic policy* as well as *state-organisation and governmental management* that have a considerable impact on citizen's positions and rights. The fundamental question is whether or not societies and citizens really benefit in the way it is advocated. To answer this question it is necessary to view the *practical consequences and effects* of neoliberal policy, and not to leave this issue to theorists alone.

Although the humanities and social science (such as sociology en philosophy) generally take a rather 'appeasing' (extenuated) position in policy-advising, neoliberal policy appears to be surrounded with many assumptions that hardly can endure critical (scientific) examination. Yet elaborated criticism remains little coherent for the time being, as it mostly gets stuck in rather *fragmentized* approaches of the issues involved. As a result of this it is often wrongly suggested (e.g. by advisory councils) that it would mainly be a matter of '*adjustment*' in order to 'solve' fundamental issues, which is quite misleading to citizens and society. Even though the USA has never been able to establish a welfare state according to the *European* (social security) model (like so many other countries have refrained to do as well), there are many American (oriented) researchers who believe they know 'exactly' what such a state – notably especially for *others* - *should* look like. This is bizarre, not to say extremely presumptuous. Yet the literature - apart from (scarce) critical reflections - is full of such orientations. But also *in Europe itself* there are too many 'observers' who completely miss central ideas and essential connotations of such an economic and governmental model. It is therefore more than desirable that such derailments be stopped and replaced. Especially since many arguments seem to be based on one-sided 'all-American' approaches that have little to do with what the institutional 'welfare state' actually entails and above all bluntly *ignore* everything that has been achieved in this area over time. Moreover, in many orientations the constructed model of *mixed economies* is largely disregarded, which gives the impression that we are only dealing with '(free) market economies' in which state and government hardly play any role of significance. As a result, *policy criticism* receives marginal attention, just as many reflections on the problems of (transforming) welfare states seem to focus mainly on some (advocated) 'adjustments', leaving the market largely alone.³⁰ This seriously detracts from the importance of the issues at stake. So, when talking about the 'status quo', what 'status' do we really mean?

In general it can be said that an explicit focus on subjective (behavioral) 'perception aspects' (in the context of health, welfare and/or income and labor market problems) entails the risk of *depolitisation*, because a shift is taking place from the *political-social* to the *individual-personal* domain and *structural* factors (and causal relationships) thus run the risk of disappearing from view. Since perception is (psychological) behavior, and behavior is learned, 'wrong' behavior can therefore also be 'unlearned' (or 'turned around'). At least this is the basic idea that subsequently seems to be rightfully released and applied to all kinds of economic and social problems (such as «poverty» which sometimes is merely seen as a 'matter of budgeting-behavior'). Such problems are then reduced to purely individual and personal issues and are no longer regarded as a (indispensable) political responsibility. (All this however on the basis of *behavioral economics* and according to the views of behavioral economists such as Ariely). However:

from a constructionist standpoint, the major questions to be asked of scientific inquiry are pragmatic in nature: what are the **outcomes** of such efforts; **what ends do they serve** and in what ways; and **for whom** do they represent **advances** and for whom are they **threatening**? (Gergen, 2009) [emph. vdK] ³¹

Now this 'constructivism' must be correctly understood, because the notion appears to be used in many ways. We, however, would mainly like to understand such constructivism as a pragmatic focus. Not as a form of some fancy 'neutrality of values', but out of practical considerations in order to view and focus on tangible and realistic results. Much is expected of '*commitment and cooperation*' together with propagated attitudes of *trust, openness, the ability to communicate, mutual acceptance, empathy, the willingness to learn, commitment to the joint task, achievement orientation, innovative creativity, conflict resolution skills* and more of these (cap)abilities, which for instance health care workers (and beyond) are expected to develop. Teamwork ('all together now') appears to be the motto. However the reality is quite different. 'Togetherness' is a euphemism that is used *ad nauseam* to suggest 'solidarity', but is mainly used to keep policy-makers and managers out of the wind so they don't need to be accountable for their actions and decisions. Despite the fact that all good is expected from 'process innovation', market competition and increases of productivity (as there is also strong lobbying for this), and the citizen is persistently paternalistically urged to 'moderation' of his needs and claims (and is deemed to protect his interests through organizing of 'cooperative self-reliance'), this is in stark contrast to the *Alleingang* of oligopolistic organizations that do not care much about such advocated or desired attitudes, but pursue their own financial and economic power interests without much concern for person or property. Healthcare is seen as an 'economic burden' and must be turned into (individual) 'opportunities' (see fig. 6). It is disconcerting to observe that in spite of all the disruptive consequences of such management delusion and hubris, as well as all the criticism towards such behavior, people continue as if nothing is wrong and if managers and administrators have a (exclusive) hold of business economic and organizational truth. Partly against this background, it is quite bizarre that such concepts are constantly being presented as *remedies and panacea* to push citizens into the desired (labor) line, while public affairs continue to erode. Such ideological framing of 'happiness', 'authenticity' and 'success' is superficial as it blurs realistic perceptions on fundamental societal questions that cannot be washed away.

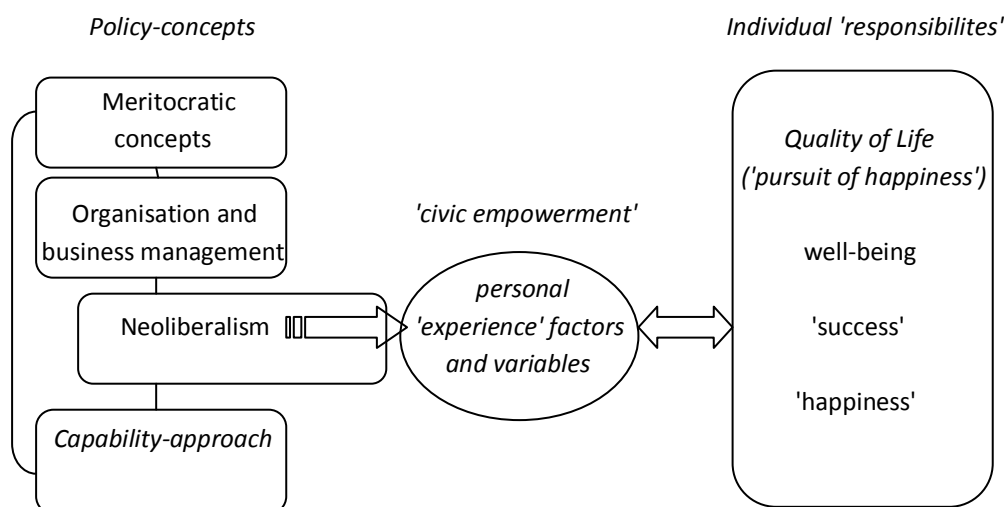


Fig.6 Conceptualization of the personal-subjectivistic ('capability') approach of public affairs

In regard to ideological consequences of neoliberalism – such as problematic healthcare – it cannot be denied that they are related to executed policies over a longer period of time. A *systematic* withholding of care – and therefore not just from *some* ('social weaker') groups as it is put too often – appears to be *immanent to neoliberal austerity policies* for quite a longer time than these recent problems have become manifest. Many though, seem willingly to be led (or appeased) by fallacies and illusive pretensions. This has determined actual mainstream political culture in a considerable way that cannot be underestimated, but also has *locked down* open-minded (political) deliberation, as we will argue. Political consciousness may be 'troubled' (as for instance it recently became visible as a result of the parliamentary examined governmental derailments in regard to social security and benefits³² in which a special established Dutch commission of inquiry found that citizens have been treated unjust and wrongly by the authorities, as they were supposed to have acted illegally as 'freeriders and free-loaders'), for the time being the 'skin' (i.e. the many troubled issues of the day) remain(s) nearer than the (ideological) 'shirt' (i.e. taking coherent positions and accounting for one's actions). Balanced self-reflection appears to be problematic in this respect. This polarizing stigmatization of citizens emerged some forty years ago during the start of rigid austerity-policy in the Netherlands, when the minister of finance at that time, Ruding (cabinet Lubbers I and II 1982-1989), bluntly declared that those who depend on social benefits were *too lazy to work* and had to be 'activated' by taking in on their lawful entitlements. He referred expressly to 'the American way of doing things', with which further (neoliberal) policy-directions were settled.³³ This was far from 'just a provocation'. It was strongly believed by the regrouping resentful conservative 'silent majority' – as they felt aggrieved or short-changed because of 'leftish policy' during the seventies³⁴ – that the welfare state, which was considered a (superfluous and 'unaffordable') 'luxury' by them, would have to be tackled head-on and that this would have to be done in an 'efficient' (read: according to the rules of modern management) way. Ruding's statements reflected these sentiments and hit the mark in no uncertain terms according to the steady growing undercurrent of countervailing forces. The paradox is that those who at the time cried out the loudest for a harsh lashing out at 'pot-consuming fraudsters', are now often (also) the ones who without blinking an eye cry over the derailed allowances debacle (see our explanation) and declare that they are extremely 'concerned' with the 'unjust' suffering that has been inflicted on many. It is however not as paradoxical as it seems, since opportunistically blowing with the wind appears to be an obstinate phenomenon of all times.

The problematic 'capabilities' approach

When promoting highly disputable '*civil society*' concepts within a 'participatory society' of 'self-governing communities' as a (sensible) 'alternative' to the institutional welfare state, one can rightly wonder in hoeverre all this is fallacious, as it always comes down to *political choices*. These will therefore continuously have to be made *explicit* and should not be presented as 'neutral' (nor 'inevitable' or 'self-evident') under the pretext of «objectivity». However, amidst an increasing *apolitical and ideology-denying* culture such desired and needed articulation of political «*nomos and logos*» has become highly 'obsolete'. That is why the economist Jacobs (2021) points out that serious errors of thought are being made here:

"It seems that Sen's capacity approach has gained considerable influence on the CBS indicators^[i] : 'health', 'housing', 'security'. At UU/Rabo^[ii] this concerns 'health', 'housing' and 'society'. Capacities and functionings are abstract concepts that are practically impossible to operationalise. As a result, all sorts of variables without a clear theoretical foundation are now placed with the welfare indicators.

ⁱ CBS stands for the *Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics*

ⁱⁱ UU refers to the University of Utrecht; Rabo to the Dutch commercial Rabo-bank. Reference is made to (contested) research by Van Bavel, B. et al. (2019)

*The CBS dashboard of broad prosperity indicators (2021) is an opened Pandora's box; no fewer than 99 different indicators (some of which overlap) are reported and presented **without any prosperity-economic coherence or underbuilding.***"

*"Policy evaluations [are] sensitive to the aggregation of included variables on the basis of prosperity indices. This aggregation implies a **politically and normatively loaded judgement** about the importance of each indicator in the social welfare, for example, the social importance of safety compared to care or education. Scientists cannot make this weighting. If they impose the aggregation method, they are making a political judgement about the importance of the various aspects of prosperity. There is also a danger that they will **reason their way to desired policy conclusions** by choosing a particular weighting scheme. This would make broad welfare indicators unusable."* [Transl. and emph. vdK] ³⁵

That is also why it is not so 'obvious' - as assumed in political and academic bodies - that by referring to capabilities (in current political Dutch jargon: '*doe-vermogen*'), 'broad prosperity' (in Dutch: '*brede welvaart*') will be sufficiently achieved. In order to combine well-balanced welfare and well-being, much more is needed than (whether or not 'objective') monitoring a 'dashboard'. Jacobs:

"A quantitative analysis of social welfare can only be made if the concept of welfare is correctly applied, political-normative judgements are made explicit for the determination of the value of each component of welfare, and it is made explicit how much everyone counts in social welfare." ³⁶

Yes indeed, without 'politics' it will evidently not work. Neither without explicitly naming the advocated ideology and without regarding the consequences of the orientations involved.

Meritocratic concepts of 'choice'

Those who boast about the 'opportunities and possibilities' that society supposedly offers should realize that citizens are expected to perform an almost impossible task of distinguishing themselves while at the same time conforming to a coercive market system. Only when society distances itself from this, and *really* provides space for personal freedom (so sung by liberals), would progress be made in this respect. (Rigid) equalization is counterproductive. Especially when 'freedom' is predominantly interpreted in a (narrow-minded) *economic* sense and it is believed that the ability to distinguish oneself (market-economically or socially) offers the citizen 'sufficient' possibilities for development. After all, economics is not identical to culture.

In short, if one continues to expect, on the basis of market-economic views, that citizens will *automatically* end up in their (right) 'place', then one is sorely mistaken. The essence of this debate is that whoever is in charge is also fully responsible for when things go wrong. That was the reason why, at the time of the (construction of) the welfare state, it was believed that the *central government* had to play an essential *redistributive* role in order to protect the citizen from the consequences of unreasonable *existential risks* such as illness, dismissal and income deprivation, which formed the basis for the construction of an extensive institutional *public sector*. This formed the core of the social security system as it was founded. Liberals, however, continued to work for a minimalist welfare state with an austere social security system ('mini-system') for those who 'really needed it' and, as a result of the emerging neoliberalism, eventually got their way. That went far, very far. That is why the then 'Third Way' Prime Minister Kok (Dutch social-democratic party PvdA) hastened to declare, during the privatization and privatization waves that had already begun, that 'we will not let anyone behind'. Fraudsters, however, had to be dealt with firmly. That was deliberately pursued 'standing policy' of which society has 'tasted' the consequences to the full. Not least the current unjustly accused citizens of fraud around the shocking affair of childcare benefits, where the government has gone way over the

top and even acted unlawfully. An 'incident'? When in 2013 the Dutch king, on behalf of the neo-liberal ('purple') VVD/PvdA cabinet (Rutte/Asscher), officially declared that the welfare state c.q. the system of public services was 'passé' and was to be *replaced* by a 'participatory society', the population could have drawn a line *there* in order to make it clear that it would not take responsibility for such a far-reaching dismantling despite the parliamentary-democratic 'legitimization'. That would have been a robust position that would have mattered and could have prevented much later misery. In any case, it would have been more robust than simply sit-by and watching societal institutions systematically crumble even further than they already had done for a long time. But that would have required undermining the *entire* neoliberal ideology and that, apparently, was a bridge too far for most people. Not only for the supporters of such a 'participatory society', but especially for those who had not seen earlier times of more balanced governmental policy.

However, the aforementioned core idea that underpinned the welfare state was largely lost with the rise of neoliberalism and reversed: the citizen is largely expected to bear these risks *himself* — after all, he is the 'director of his own life', so it is said, and has 'free access' to (commercial) insurance arrangements, while the State provides the necessary 'supplementation'. So, what's the problem with that... . This tour de force lies at the root of a great many socio-economic and social problems that we are facing today. It is also reflected in the approach to the *corona* crisis, which has long lacked the necessary central direction. In other words, the 'freedom to be who you want to be' is paid for dearly and amounts to a boundless (neoliberal) overestimation of (the control over one's own) 'identity determination' in a social sense. Identity includes considerably more than gender-related aspects or 'being yourself'. It is not without reason that Bauman spoke of «*fluid identities*» in the midst of a *fragmented modernity* that is blowing in all directions. Much slips out of our hands when we are not careful, but continue on a disastrous path of individualistic positioning, or cling to collective delusions that have little to do with 'identity'. In a globalized market society we are all subject to mechanisms that are determined only by *a few*. This *oligarchic-oligopolistic* coterie follows its own laws and thus in fact dictates entire societies. Societies, which despite all ideological controversies are more similar than it is presented. Power concentration can only be countered with solid counter-power. This does not come from self-satisfied 'consumers', but from *politically aware* civilian populations who know how to join forces in a right, i.e. effective way. As long as this is structurally lacking, little or nothing will change. Not even in an identity-defining sense. On the other hand history – even contemporary history – cannot be maltreated with impunity.

4 | The (ideological) sound of silence

Vanitas and fidelitas

The ideological debate about the institutional economic order of capitalist late-modern societies is hardly conducted any longer, but mainly *avoided* as if Marx and Keynes never have existed and only the neoliberal ideology of the market can function as 'sole truth'. The reason for this is obvious: the *status quo* – and especially the underlying ideology – must be maintained in full. However much that status quo shows structural defects. This 'looking away' therefore does not promote the insight that is necessary to face up to societal problems and to tackle them properly.

Nachtwey (2016) speaks of «*regressive modernity*» (regressive Modernisierung). The regression includes '*den Umstand dass Gegenwartsgesellschaften hinter das in der sozialen Moderne erreichte Niveau an Integration zurückfallen*' ³⁷, which seems to contradict the conception of modernity as 'progress' and thus would be a *contradiction in terms*. But since the concepts of modernity and modernization are used in many meanings and include anything but linear or monocausal processes, regression – in this case in terms of 'social integration' is less exceptional than it seems. '*Unterschiedliche Symptome regressiver Modernisierungen finden sich in nahezu allen [...] gesellschaft-*

lichen Feldern – in der parlamentarischen Demokratie, auf dem Arbeitsmarkt und auch im Bildungssystem.' [...] 'Die politische Teilhabe in der Demokratie wird abgelöst durch eine ökonomische Partizipation auf den (Arbeits-)Markten... .' ³⁸ Nachtwey also refers in this context to Habermas who has pointed to 'Kolonialisierung der Lebenswelt durch die wachsende Dominanz von Systemimperativen' from the 1980s onwards ³⁹, which mainly refers to the increasing dependence on power structures and encapsulation of citizens' privacy.

In short, processes of decline and regression in divergent social fields. According to Nachtwey, these processes (given their diffuse nature and many concealed manifestations) are not so easy to connect and to interpret *in coherence* ⁴⁰, although we agree with Nachtwey that the *common denominator of regression* is in every way plausible and that the overall *neoliberal policy transformation* must be considered to a large extent as a determining factor for this regression. This political transformation that took shape since the 1980s and in which (economic) processes of liberalization are central, is called by Nachtwey (with reference to the political and historical economist Polanyi), a '*Taufelsmühle*' ['satanic mill', being a devilish treadmill or merry-go-round], which was intended to provide '*Korridore für die Komplizenschaft [complicity] mit dem Markt*' and which amounted to '**Übertragung staatlicher Kompetenzen an Märkte**' [a transfer of statist/governmental responsibilities and competencies to the market]. ⁴¹

In this context we would like to speak of a **third** policy (and cultural) transformation (see fig.7) as a characteristic pattern of late modern (post-industrial) societies, which on the one hand can be situated in the continuation of the market society that emerged with industrialization, but which on the other hand constitutes a **major break** (caesura) with the development of the institutionalized model of the (intervening) welfare state as it was established during the second half of the 20th century. The core of the regression lies in this caesura. In this respect there is no question of a 'natural' or 'inevitable' process, but of (purposeful) conscious political planning. The neoliberal market economy is therefore a *construction*, just as the welfare state is. It reverts to a nineteenth century industrial society model and the established institutional welfare state structures are gradually (further) dismantled with disintegrating consequences.

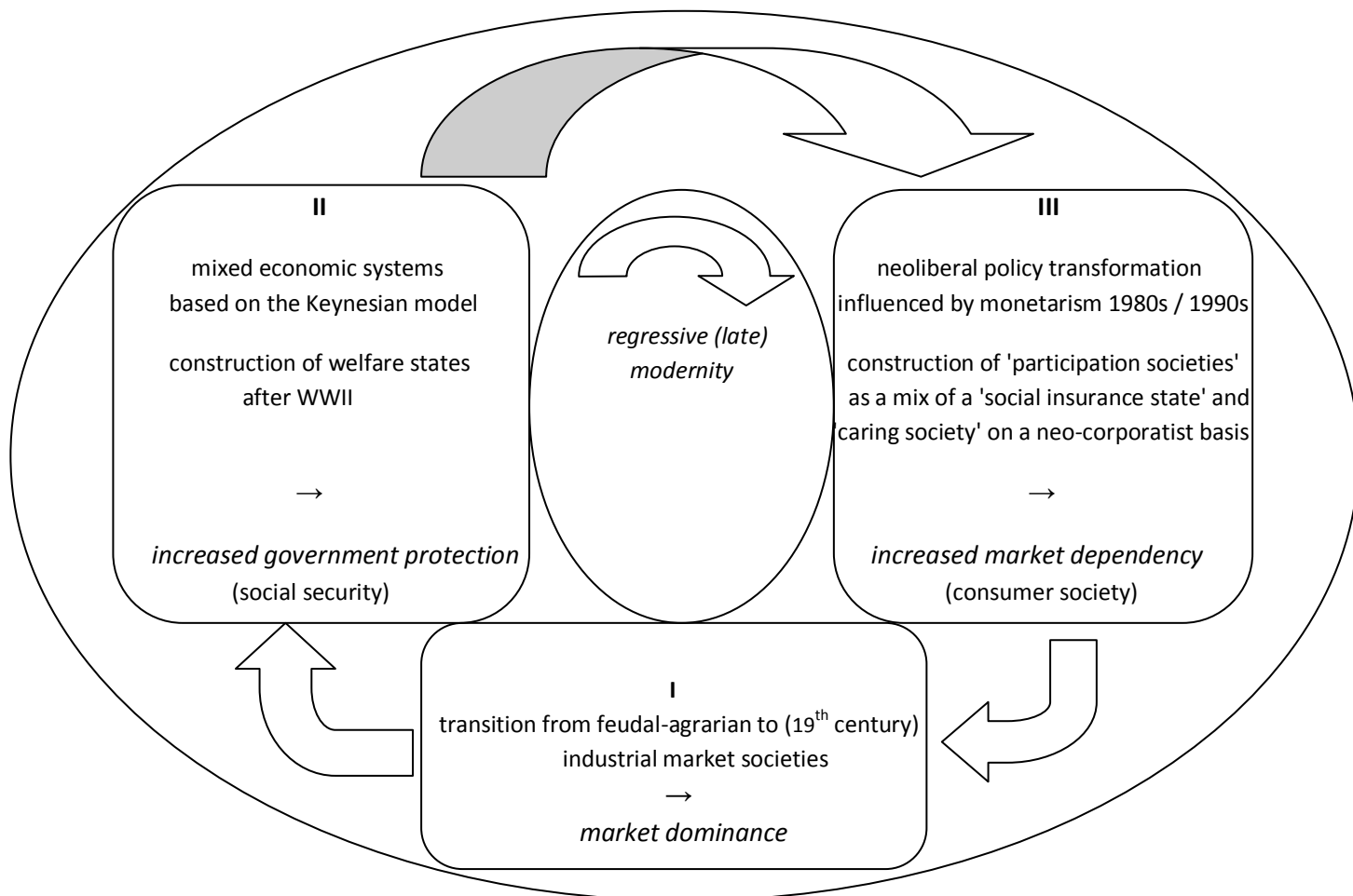


Fig.7 Transformation cycle with regard to the economic order

Explanation of the model

The **first transformation** covers the transformation described by Polanyi (1944) as a result of the industrial modernity development which gave rise to the *market society* and associated market dominance (I). The **second** involves the emergence of mixed economic systems and the *construction of welfare states* with institutionalized social security, as described by Thoenes (1962) for the Dutch situation, which reduced market dominance (II). The **third** includes the *neoliberal policy transformation* of the 1980s and 1990s and its sequel, as constructed in the current era with the (Dutch) 'participation society'. This combined (neoliberal-neocorporatist) model of a 'social insurance state' and a so called 'caring society' includes in many respects a certain return – or *regression* – to the 19th century industrial order model. The difference being that the government now participates more actively than ever in a movement towards (once again) an *increasing market dominance* and the citizen does not have to be *completely* without social security (despite the fact that this security is rapidly eroding). However, the *dependence* of both the citizen, society and political decision-making on the market and its financial-economic power structures is increasing as a result of this policy shift (III). Following Polanyi and Thoenes, we postulate our thesis as a theoretical model of a comprehensive *transformation cycle* and in doing so, we also aligne with the analyses of Bauman (2000, 2003, 2007), Beck (2004) and Nachtwey (2016) regarding (late) modernity.⁴² In contrast, societies that have built little or no welfare states to the full (such as the US) can easily imagine themselves 'in line with modernity' without facing transformations II and III in the way such is the case in Western European welfare states. This also explains the predominantly negatively tinged analyses and biased positions in the Anglo-Saxon literature, both with regard to the construction and transformation of the welfare state

model itself, and with regard to the (predominantly continental) European *critique* of the continued dominance of the market ideology as propagated in particular from the U.S.⁴³

No 'alternatives' ?

For those who have never known anything other than the current *neoliberal state organization* (roughly all those born after 1975), it is understandable that they willingly accept the view that there are 'no alternatives.' For many of them, it is difficult to imagine a different constellation in which *market and government* were organized in a more balanced ratio and in which *institutional social security* was a key concept. Those who grew up with purely market(ing) concepts and expect all the benefits from them have little affinity with critical counter-movements that point to this recent organizational past. After all, that is 'out of date'. Thus neoliberal market technocrats keep a free hand and such politicians manage to keep young people (and certainly not only them) appeased with dreamed visions. And with success, as long as the «*Abstieg*» (Nachtwey) – or the downward spiral in terms of conditions of existence – does not set in and affect them personally. Because then occasional (expensively paid) government incentives no longer will help. After all, 'free money' exists only on paper. 'He who looks backward does not become a follower', so the saying goes, but the reverse is equally true: those who look to the present and neglect the past run the risk of becoming easy prey for demagoguery. Education and training – if done well, at least – are therefore more than 'fitting in', or 'conforming' to what is expected and accepted in a *market-economic* sense. (Just as schools, by the way, are not meant to be 'care centers' for the children of working parents). Educational institutions that are supposed to provide purely the desired supply for the labor market (or the 'self-employed market') might object to this and distance themselves from it, were it not for the fact that many administrators are all too happy to be led astray by such views. After all, education offers all the perspectives we want, doesn't it? 'We' don't need any 'superfluous ballast' for that (etc.). Critical citizens, however, do not arise 'naturally'. Certainly not with so much conformist orientation that promises a lot, but unfortunately has (too) little to offer in terms of content. Not only young people, but *society as a whole* suffers more from this kind of oversimplification than the many whinging about the 'future of the next generations' would suggest. This 'concern' turns out to have an extremely narrow base. In any case just as narrow-minded and short-sighted as neocorporatists think they can project onto the civic community, with all their pretended ideological 'neutrality'. This neutrality is a farce and as unrealistic as it is hypocritical. 'Hope for a better future' will therefore prove to be merely a cry of despair.

Is (steadfastly) '*staying yourself*', as is widely propagated in all sorts of shapes and sizes, then the remedy? This is highly doubtful. Man is historically and contextually 'determined', in the sense that he does not float around in the universe like a 'neutral atomic particle'. In a society that demands more and more from people (adaptation, 'flexibility') it is not so strange that many lose their way. But to (assume) that individual position (and identity) determination can offer sufficient counterweight against *expanding power structures* is, to put it mildly, rather naive. This ignores the political dimension and significance of problems in society and *overestimates* the possibilities that (modern) man has in this respect. One may want to dismiss 'pathologization' of human problems as an overstrained 'psychological fixation' (Brinkmann, 2016/2020⁴⁴), but there do appear to be many pathologizing societal developments and mechanisms that push society out of balance and can disrupt people considerably (Van der Kooij 2020; see also Habermas; Mudde 2010; Honneth 2014; Jacobs 2016; Bueno 2017; Smith 2017; Hirvonen 2018; Laitinen 2015 / Laitinen and Särkelä 2018; Freyenhagen 2018; Verovšek 2019). Neoliberal ideology is in no small part to blame for this, as it reduces societal issues to purely individual problems precisely because of an *apolitical* approach.

In short: you take your chances and if not, something is 'wrong' *with you*. That is a sure recipe for disruption of any meaningful – realistic – perception of reality. When one makes a plea for historical and contextual awareness (as Brinkmann tries to do), then one should also give it a proper follow-up and not burden people at length with even more despair that does not benefit them. That is putting the cart before the horse. In all relevant ethical reflections of both past and present, *greed* is considered an extremely evil vice. It is therefore all the more perverse when citizens are urged to exercise 'restraint and thrift', while power-hungry cynical operators are free to indulge in such greed under the pretext of 'market freedom' and are also given every opportunity to do so by those in charge.

It may therefore seem paradoxical to want to interpret disordering social phenomena in pathological terms which are met with quite some criticism, but it is – and remains – important to make a distinction between (1) individual pathological labeling and (2) an overall cultural-social syndrome of which the (increased tendency to) individual labeling forms a substantial part. (In this respect we agree with Brinkmann). The first can be seen as a consequence of a *meritocratic culture that has drifted too far*, the second as a consequence of a multicausal development of (problematic) modernity in combination with the social consequences of political-ideological polity and policy turns, whereby increasingly is fallen back to the (industrial) concept of the citizen as a (purely) *economic production factor and 'cost item'*.

In contrast to the alleged ignorance towards neoliberalism, there appears to be a great deal of misunderstanding about the question of what a **society** actually entails. This leads to much (political and social) bickering about the correct positioning of populations. Therefore a brief clarification.

Societies are in any case *not* an arbitrary sum of individuals. But 'by definition' certainly not a homogeneous amorphous mass either, nor a collection of 'communities' (which may or may not be expected to 'govern themselves'). Not a collection of 'I's', nor a massive, selective, or exclusive 'We'. So what is a society really, and does it have an *identity* at all ? These questions relate to the pair of concepts «**Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft**» raised earlier. The first concept refers to the view that a society would be a 'people's community' ('*Volksgemeinschaft*') with shared cultural values, as those who point to norms and (core) values constantly emphasize. These values are said to constitute the essence of the 'people's' bonding from which a community derives its uniqueness. The second term, on the other hand, refers to the *society as a construction*, which is formed in particular by its accumulated *institutions of the rule of law*. Whereas the Gemeinschaft has a connotation of a certain 'natural' (organic) order, the essence of the Gesellschaft lies with a more constructivist ordering component that has been created by human hands (and can therefore always be changed or adapted again). In other words, the Gemeinschaft concept primarily amounts to a *static* approach, whereas Gesellschaft is by definition a more *dynamic* concept. In the latter approach, therefore, the (political-constitutional) concept of the **citizen** is also central for a reason. Citizens, however, with institutionalized *positions and rights*, as opposed to members of a community who are supposed to be bound to each other primarily by *blood relationship, language and/or attachment to a territory*.⁴⁵

It should be clear that these two concepts and approaches are (historically) an extension of each other and do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. At least when one realizes that there may be overlap and *provided* one also realizes that there may well be conflicting elements at work which can get in each other's way. The idea that there would be a 'natural' order that would 'automatically' result from a shared sense of standards and values is a misconception. Just as societies, on the other hand, do not imply an 'exclusive cultural interconnectedness' but are instead always *pluralistic* in character. In short, one does not automatically lead to the other. Quite a few people have difficulty with both observations (and their *implications*), as is demonstrated time and time again. That is why nationalists insist on rather *illusory community concepts* and technocrats believe that everything can be 'contained'

as long as the many-headed and also rather 'unruly' pluriformity is kept 'within limits'. (Which would mean as much as doing 'justice' to this professed pluriformity, even if only in name). Paradoxical as it may seem, in this respect the two positions do not diverge that much. Hence the relentless philippicas of rabid nationalists against the multicultural society, although received with scorn, show more similarities with the hammering on (whether or not 'excellent') 'national distinctiveness' by the declared opponents than they usually realize. This is painful, but a reality. The broad disregard for a proper concept of «*citizenship*» is the essence of this mishmash of nationalistic oriented approaches. Issues of (dual) nationality, as well as immigration, integration and adaptation, as well as those of 'participation' and the like, are directly related to this. A myriad of half-baked *societal views* underlie this, as mentioned above. That is why talking about 'constitutional law' and the 'democratic constitutional state' is not a non-committal (theoretical) matter, but covers many practical areas of life. This certainly applies not least to political (policy) decisions that are taken under the influence of such ideas and opinions. Many people do not realize this enough.

Those who – also in this respect – have no proper understanding of the neoliberal market ideology, cannot make a correct analysis of *current social problems* either, since many issues are directly or indirectly related to this political ideology. Neoliberal (coalition) parties, however, seem to live in a different world. The central misconception has long been that if the *market* is given as much free rein as possible, a 'just society' will automatically come about. 'Communal governmentality', as the accompanying *civil society* concept is called, does not solve this problem. But quite apart from this ideological aberration, to achieve such justice one will always have to *intervene*, since 'justice' is simply not a 'natural given' thing. Just as the market of supply and demand is not a 'self-governing' system in this respect. This 'invisible hand' does not exist. The Netherlands – no matter how one looks at it and despite all the cutbacks – just like many other countries still has a *mixed economic system* in which the government – albeit under neoliberal rule in a fairly minimalist way – plays a role that cannot be ignored. It should be realized that the economy itself is not an end in itself, but a *means to secure living conditions* of citizens. To declare the economy 'sacred', or above any doubt or political discussion, is to lay the axe to the root of correct governance and policy. For the time being prime minister Rutte seems to be taking the right position on the issue of *inequality of assets*, by refusing to go along with proposals that *lump all assets together* and aim to tax them (extra). Assets can be obtained from speculation and returns on investments, but many accumulated – though by no means always convertible into readily available funds (!) – 'assets' such as home ownership (financed with mortgages) and (deferred) pension entitlements are foremost the result of personally executed *labor*. It would then be inappropriate to impose a hefty capital tax on top of the already (heavily) taxed labour income. That would be disproportionate and undesirable from the point of view of social solidarity. But as long as *capital assets* are largely exempt from taxation, there is, of course, cause for political commotion. Just as the skewed fiscal distribution between *labor and capital* remains a political issue of the first order. In short, the statement 'no (or 'less') ideology' amounts to a *continued embrace* of the existing neoliberal ideology and, like the slogan 'neither left nor right', is a political aberration. Therefore, instead of a (continued) 'lockdown', what about a solid general and nationwide strike by all sectors? After all, the citizen does not have to put up with everything and, with all the democratic shortcomings, is still the one who decides how he wants to organize his society. He is not the cash cow who has to be systematically ripped off, but has the full right to put a stop to this. Even if this is 'extra-parliamentary'. He has never given a mandate for unbridled 'capital transitions' i.e. a *withdrawal of public funds for the benefit of market parties*. Yet, as mentioned earlier, as a result of the commercial privatization of the energy-market he is compelled to pay *cumulatively* (up to four times) for 'his' energy supply, namely: for the supplied *energy itself*, on top of that *energy taxes*, the subsidized

energy transition in companies ('innovation') and finally the *passing on* of all cost increases in pricing. A striking example – there are apparently many more – of lucrative 'business by untouchables' that 'benefits' consumers when governments do not 'govern', but follow (and imitate) the market unconditionally in all its disruptive ways.

'Stunde Null': meaningful perspectives or more of the same?

In mixed economic systems it is essential to make a clear distinction between what can be left to the market and what belongs to public service. When the supply of public goods is made the playground of all sorts of (commercial or market-oriented) parties, society runs the risk that general interests – which are of fundamental importance to all citizens – will be *subordinated* to financial and business interests and it will subsequently have to pay the price. It can be observed that administrators in the educational, health care, housing and social security sectors are increasingly inclined to behave like '*entrepreneurs*' and to model the organizations for which they are responsible after this image. This has certainly not benefited such organizations, the labor relations and the quality of the services. On the other hand, we see that many (smaller) companies are forced to measure up to powerful international concerns and that with regard to tax regulations, contrastive standards are applied. Moreover, entrepreneurs are faced with a maze of complex rules and regulations which makes it extremely difficult for them to compete freely and transparently. The result is that the public and market sectors become *intertwined in an extremely unproductive manner* and the necessary visibility of both domains becomes diffuse or even disappears completely. Attempting to address this interdependence with *ad hoc* measures and policies does not advance the economic organization of society in any way. First and foremost, it must be made clear *what relationship between government and market, with an appropriate structure and institutional organization*, is considered desirable (or undesirable) with regard to basic principles of economic organization and governance. As long as this clarity is lacking or being avoided, the lack of transparency will only increase and neither public services nor competitive relations will improve. It can therefore be said that putting off or ignoring such essential issues is doing society a disservice and that it is no longer possible to avoid facing up to such matters. This requires political *realism* and *self-reflection*. Attitudes and perceptions, however, which generally appear to be moderately developed in the rather opaque political domain. First and foremost, it is of utmost importance that politicians become aware of the need for *fundamental economic reorientation* and that they are being able to develop a *consistent policy vision* that does not immerse society and its citizens in a 'mystifying murk', but provides them with clarity and insight into the problematic aspects of the current financial-economic structures in the midst of a globalizing world order. Proposed policies should not hand society over to diffuse powers and forces, but rather protect her from the consequences of these developments (if not from the forementioned phenomena as such). Given the current political mores and prevailing market ideology, however, this seems a rather 'idealistic' appeal. Especially as long as the electorate meekly continues to follow the (continued) neoliberal call for 'self-regulation' and 'personal responsibility', there seems little (immediate) need for political movements and parties to reconsider and reorient. The *social necessity*, however, is no less and will undoubtedly assert itself in the near future.

Necessities of life, such as living conditions, social securities and well-being are not 'commodities' that can be 'traded at will' as it suits financial-economic interests, but are *the core of general societal interests*. Then society will also have to be organized and structured accordingly. The model of the welfare state offered a meaningful perspective for this, which contrariwise has been thrown out of the window under unsound and false pretexts for too long. Technocratic-neoliberal management based on civil society concepts of 'self-managing communities' turned out to be a counterproductive polity model and amounts to a *regressive* development, for which serious warnings were issued.⁴⁶ Among

others Wilkinson and Piketty have shown that this regressive path of modern capitalism based upon neoliberal views is a dead end one. Inequality is increasing and as a result citizens' opportunities and possibilities for improving their position and living conditions are decreasing. This is exactly the opposite of what always has been claimed by neoliberals. That is why they reject critical findings and prefer to dismiss them as 'irrelevant' because in their eyes (economic) 'progress' is being made in spite of such 'comment'. This 'progress' however turns out to be extremely questionable, because it is *selective*. Only the 'happy few' really (but disproportionately) benefit from this economic order. At least as long as it lasts, because when the shore turns the (rudderless) ship sooner than one would like, then all 'euphoria' about the claimed successes will soon be over. Certainly not only in the financial-economic sense, but also as far as the *democratic constitutional state* and its governmental possibilities are concerned. Without sufficient historical (and social) awareness and self-reflection, things will get completely stuck. A little less 'smugness' and more reflection on the part of policy-makers and those responsible for executing such policies would be a salutary start in order to rediscover the *human dimension*, which is now mainly professed rhetorically. Man should not be at the mercy of the 'gods', nor of 'providence' or 'fate', but should be able to rely on well-thinking, expert and honest (incorruptible) administrators for his living conditions. This calls for a considerable change in the (decision-making) culture, taking sharp account of life in the midst of an expanding mass society and market. Other – more realistic and less overwrought – approaches to life chances, health, well-being, 'success' and 'happiness' are sorely needed, where these notions seem increasingly embedded in exploiting mechanisms that hand people over to the market and condemn everyone to uncompromising 'competition'. This is not 'binding together', but amounts to pointless polarization that serves only repressive purposes. Unless these issues are thrown open, such 'debates' will remain a shadowy spectacle. In this regard, a truly *open society* is both means and end. A broad and effective removal of all borders that keep people artificially separated is a prerequisite for achieving this goal. It is not a question of 'reinventing' critical theory, as Kjaer and Olsen (2016), among others, wrongly believe ⁴⁷, but of puncturing the neoliberal bubble and, above all, of *demythologizing* and denouncing the rather gratuitously assumed 'adaptive capacity' of the welfare state. That is, to strip the advocated, but hardly corresponding to correct governance, neoliberal and corporatist conceptions of the (necessary deemed) *transformation from institutionalized welfare to the concept of a so-called 'participation society'* of its false pretensions. The critical approaches that have been developed offer sufficient leads to refute all of this and have therefore never lost their relevance or topicality. It is therefore important to apply the insights developed in word and deed and not to leave such matters solely to merely 'theorizing' academic circles. In doing so, historical lessons will have to be taken fully to heart, as anyone who is aware of relevant historical developments need not be condemned to (such) 'reinvention exercises'. Against illusory idealism, rightly focused political engagement has proved to be a powerful force for demystifying that which has been clouded by false connotations of 'progressive' change in wrong, i.e. *socially harmful* directions. When for instance, as a result of all the ongoing processes of administrative fragmentation, the *rule of law* comes under pressure and the government no longer considers citizens primarily as «citoyens» but mainly (or exclusively) as 'consumers' and 'clients', citizens may *think* they can rely on their Constitution, but then it may turn out that in conflicts in which their constitutional rights are at stake, they are *exclusively dependent* on the civil code and that an (individual) appeal to the court is the only remaining option to 'get justice' done. A meager (juridified) 'fighting society' will then be the result, with all its consequences associated with the *already existing and increasing* social and legal inequalities.

In conclusion, much of what has been achieved in the recent past in the interests of citizens and society is fragmenting because of far-reaching carelessness, indifference and cynicism. Not only the *foundations* on which societies are based, but also the political debate and the underlying ideas and concepts

that should underpin the arguments put forward to justify 'transitions'. People no longer 'understand' each other because of the many (fashionable management and marketing) 'languages' that are used. Much reasoning appears to be extremely sloppy and idle. What remains is a 'hellish cacophony' in the midst of the word-cramming pandemonium. All very fine for the entertainment industry though, were it not that citizens are largely left to their own 'fortune'. For just as the American civilian population is bent over backwards to finance the sky-high *defense expenditure*, so the Dutch taxpayer is being stripped to the bone in an identical manner for all possible 'politically-correct' purposes in the areas of 'health', well-being ('wellness'), 'innovation', 'the environment' and more.

Not only in right-wing circles, but gradually also in 'left-wing' (climate and health) bodies many appear to be following extremely conservative and reactionary currents. It would be wise, however, not to allow oneself to be pressured by shadowy 'think tanks' and lobby circuits (either in the Netherlands or elsewhere). A lot would be gained by this, since taking more distance from such propagandistic orientations could have a liberating effect and would undoubtedly give the political debate on social issues more urgently needed 'breathing and space'. Certainly now that it has become clear on all sides how much imported *anti-statist* views in the field of economics and administration are disrupting and undermining tried and tested European approaches to the organization of society. *New Public Management*, *behavioral economics* and 'North-American-style' *nationalist-corporatist civil society concepts* have *not* proved beneficial as widely assumed, but have regressively robbed societies of their established institutional structures.

State-capitalism

The way in which market fundamentalism now *merges* with environmental fundamentalist orientations is characteristic of the current ideological mode of thinking which – even in democratic constitutional states – acquires more and more an all-encompassing connotation and impact of 'state capitalism' (see fig. 8).

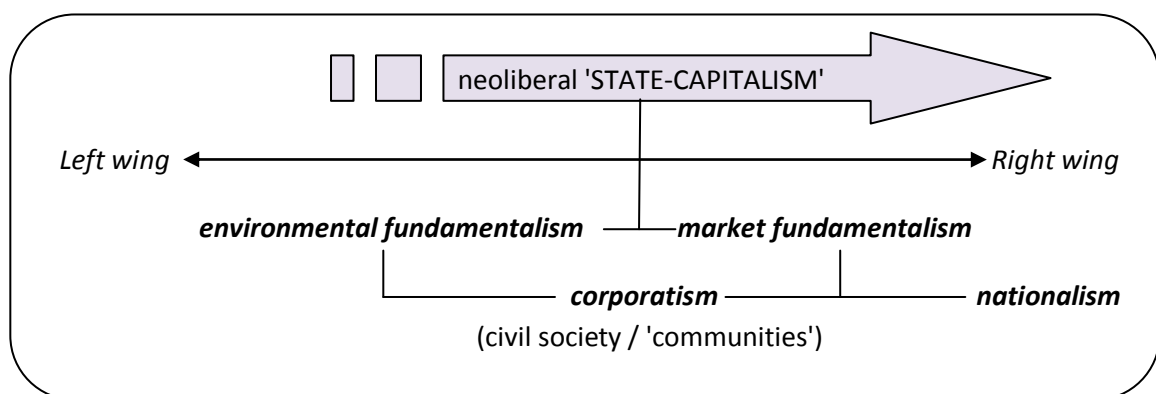


Fig. 8 Conceptualization of the (merging) actual relationship between neoliberal ideological orientations and their positions in the political spectrum

Neoliberalism thus has become a comprehensive ideology that now covers the *entire political spectrum* and largely swallows up former social-democratic, social-liberal and christian-democratic orientations. The ongoing merging of rather fundamentalistic environmental views with market concepts together with corporatist and nationalist elements, leads to a virtually *impenetrable set of societal views* with rather absolutist, not to say totalitarian, features. Although *corporatism* is fundamentally a right wing orientation, corporatist views on organizing political participation of 'self-reliance' have spread widely throughout the contemporary political spectrum. In addition, under the influence of advancing *nationalism*, there is a continuous **movement to the right**. The rather

paradoxical outcome is that *anti-statist* neoliberalism ultimately leads to a form of 'state capitalism', in which the state does not so much act as a 'regulator', but primarily as an '*advanced post for the market*'. Although apparently this collides with nationalistic notions of advocated 'national sovereignty' among a globalizing market-economy, this phenomenon appears to be the overall *key-shift* in political thought, that clearly seems to be a problematic intellectual 'bridge too far' nowadays for quite some observers, researches and scientists alike. They rather cling to an outdated (static) *dichotomy* of 'left' and 'right' that should underpin a rather *one-dimensional* way of looking at current political developments. This blurs every single debate on what societies really have to face up to and what is needed for urgent, but for the time being neglected or dismissed, structural changes in this respect.

5 | *The end of the line*

Problematic realism and poorly developed self-reflection

The actual political-administrative impasse as a result of neoliberal policy ambivalence and hubris leads to very remarkable perceptions of reality. Some believe they can make rapid progress when the corona-pandemic is over and 'lessons' are being learned. What these lessons should entail, however, remains unclear, given the way in which ideologists of progressiveness think they can regard '*technological innovation*' as a panacea. The market would – again – be 'self-supporting' and ensure economic prosperity, as the central idea seems to be. For example, companies should focus on 'nanotechnology' and invest in 'digi(ali)zation of education'. Again, the computer and its applications as a *panacea* for a 'glorious future' for all. How long have we heard such a mediocre atonal sound ? And above all: what has it brought society apart from unbridled technologicalization ? Computersystems still turn out to be very vulnerable and anything but 'stable', especially where administrative processes are concerned. Especially since *human input* remains a factor that is being underestimated or neglected completely. Political processes are disrupted rather than promoted in an 'efficient' way. Moreover, a lot of employment is lost through such 'efficiency'. Surely 'the machine' can assist people, but cannot *replace or compensate* for the discard of the human factor. That was the case long before and will remain so. Others argue that one could – and should – return to 'normal life' as soon as possible. That 'normality' turns out though to be more of the same. Continuation on the road as indicated above that is, and above all: 'allow the neoliberal social and economic order to remain leading and guiding'. Disregarding all that this ideology has already ravaged, the emphasis on such 'normality' is an unparalleled example of (technocratic self-)overestimation. Without a clear and steadfast government, the market will go its own way and what the consequences will be should yet be known to the full. But in contrast to this, one wishes to maintain the 19th century concept of a 'self-regulating economy' that could be kept on track with some (billion-dollar) 'adjustments'. However, citizens in particular must be kept in line and 'participate normally' – meaning a willing conforming attitude to this ideology – as the guiding thought seems to be. Conversely the bankruptcy of such thinking is denied by all possible means while the debate on it is completely avoided. Rather head in the sand than facing fundamental planning problems appears to be the overall attitude. The blind spots appear to thrive in many guises. Finally, there are those who hold the opinion that there would be a 'Stunde Null' and that one could start (and move on) with a clean slate. However, an *impasse* is not identical to a past (policy) that can be erased just like that, even if attempts are made to present this constellation as such. Especially those who were responsible for the resulting 'impasse' (rather: the profound administrative malaise and all the serious mistakes surrounding it) have (political) butter on their heads and should know better. Rhetoric does not resolve important issues such as inequality, administrative fragmentation, cluttering, and the concentration of financial-economic power. Those who advocate primarily analysis can be

praised so much for their substantive approach to the administrative impasse, without willingness to take actual action on this, such efforts will remain fruitless. Politics is running into itself anyway, and as long as the pickets are beaten in the same way as before, neither improvement nor progress will be made. 'Normality' will undoubtedly return, but with all its ambivalence and illusory hubris. Then it will be possible to 'party' again and dance around the mammon as usual. And yes, we will be able to 'hold each other together' again. Long live progress, the 'capacity to learn' and the 'transparency' professed by the mouth Yes, one must have 'confidence', but *in what* exactly? Without a future perspective, the past is doomed, but without an account of the past there is no meaningful future either. Trying to make marks on the spot as a tactical 'sur place' that pushes matters forward and leaves them for what they are while one has every chance and should also use it to change beacons, is a weakness bid. Ignoring this for the sake of convenience will prove to be a mistake. The (uncomfortable) reality cannot be covered up. Certainly not with fancy talk.

One of the main arguments for taking up the *transformation of the welfare state* was the complaint that this system would make citizens too 'dependent' on bureaucratic laws and regulations (and that its implementation would have been 'too susceptible' to fraud). However, the increased bureaucracy is a consequence of modernity on which citizens and society are fundamentally dependent to a large extent. This does however not alter the fact that political trust can also be related to this ever-expanding bureaucracy – meaning the entirety of legislation and regulations and the associated civil service. *Bureaucracy*, according to Weber, serves functions without political 'party-pris' (bias) and without regard to the person. Hierarchy, loyalty, expertise, neutrality and continuity are key concepts for a rational, efficient working method of the civil service and public administration. The bureaucracy does not produce 'its own product', has no 'own' values, is at a distance and has both advantages and disadvantages. The following benefits of administrative implementation for citizens and the public administration can be mentioned:

- a neutral and rational working method according to the principle of *legality*
- efficient and targeted *public service*
- *legal equality* and lawful *certainty*
- *knowledge and expertise* as a basis for sound governmental executive functioning
- and *continuity in policy orientations*

On the other hand there may be disadvantages such as:

- the bureaucratic working method and order can be *at odds* with *democratic principles of openness* and (parliamentary) accountability according to the *Trias Politica* (legislative versus executive power)
- which makes it difficult to understand and *control policy preparation and policy-implementing tasks* (transparency)
- so that consequently there is a danger of *bureaucratic concentration of power and executive arbitrariness*
- as well as *impersonality in performance* (as a negative consequence of the principle of equality)
- and that due to the tendency to '*compartmentalization*' (i.e. ineffectiveness of decision-making as a result of opaque procedures and rigid hierarchical structures), policymaking bodies and agencies *conflict* with each other and/or conflict with *aimed policy goals and outcomes*.

The requirement of *integrity* applies to all officials and authorities in the public domain. This means, among other things, that one must be able to trust that there are no conflicts of interest, that confidential information will be handled discreetly and that officers in charge are expert and reliable. With the attack on bureaucratic dependence, however, it was not so much the drawbacks that were targeted, but *the bureaucratic organization of public administration as such*, which was regarded as a

'nuisance' and which obstacles were subsequently *attributed to the citizen* who was considered to profitize 'passively' and to make 'unjustly' use of benefit provisions and rights.

With the implemented transformation policy, public administration was therefore tackled *commercially and 'businesslike'* to such an extent that – in particular – the *advantages* (which with regard to the democratic constitutional state are not to be underestimated) were largely lost. From now on, the government was seen as a 'company', which ought to be performing with sufficient 'output'. Political primacy disappeared into the background and the effective controllability of society became questionable and problematic. Ideological concepts of neoliberalism such as anti-statist concepts based on (cynical) mistrust, perpetuate *mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecy* that erode the foundations of state and government (see fig. 9).

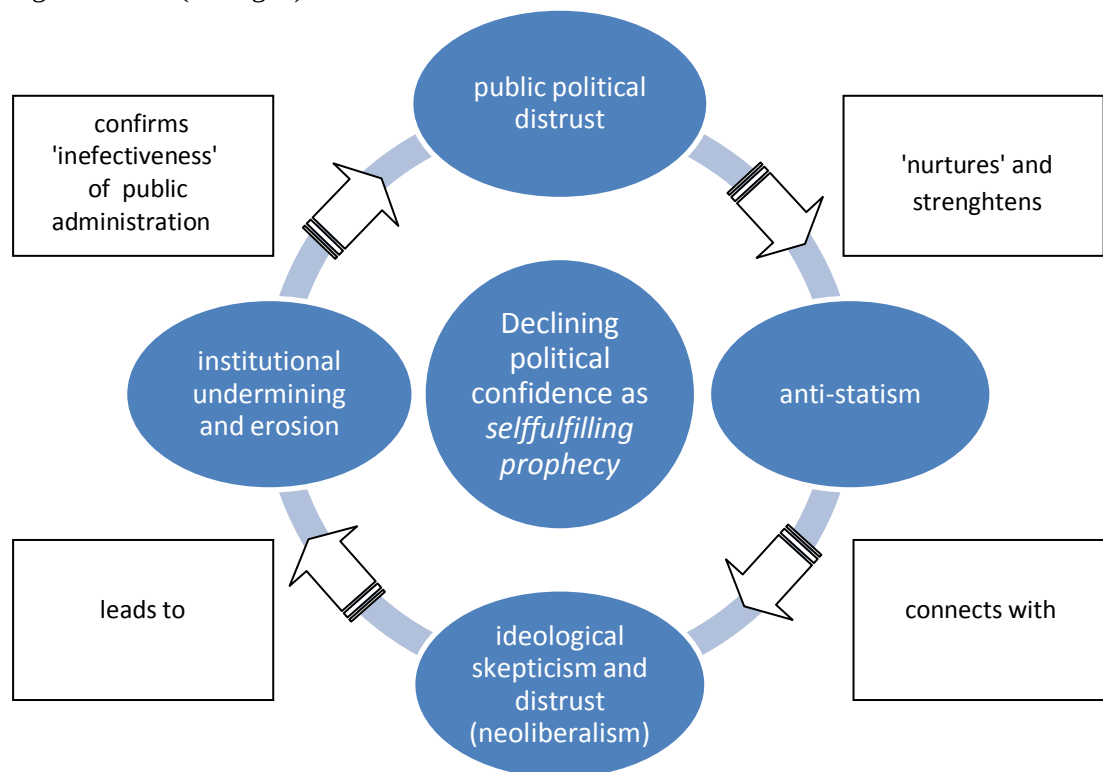


Fig. 9 Declining political confidence as selffulfilling prophecy

A society based on mutual distrust is (ultimately) short-lived, or at the very least does not make (optimal) use of the available *capacities* it could deploy. **Trust** between government and citizens, and between citizens themselves (employers versus employees, teachers and students, parents and children, native and citizens from foreign origins, old versus young, healthy and sick or disabled, working versus unemployed, etc.) is therefore indispensable if one does not want a society in which everything and everyone is permanently under surveillance and control. When the *essential social condition of inclusivity-based trust* is missing, no system can compensate for this lack, whatever one may think of or develop in terms of control measures and procedures. This notion seems inadequately developed in contemporary society and political culture, when we observe the in many ways 'repressive' policies. Policy-makers seem to be permanently seeking their 'guidance' in tightening up (even more) mandatory laws and regulations, which can usually be traced back to a fundamental lack of confidence in civic attitudes. This also applies to social and business organizations. Now it could be considered that trust – and certainly blind faith – is 'naive', but it appears that organized trust is more effective than organized mistrust. Also the 'output' will be many times greater. Citizens can do with fewer rules, require less supervision, and politicians can therefore focus more on real abuse and

derailments if this is the case. Generalizing citizens in an antagonistic and stigmatizing way ultimately turns against those who provoke such separatism. If this realization were to penetrate, many changes for the better could be brought about to the benefit of society and its citizens. For the time being, *those* organizational and management views seem to prevail in which people are unable or unwilling to take all this as a starting point, no matter how much people talk about and call on 'empowerment', efficiency, 'capabilities', 'flexibility' and so on. It is not so much the *citizen* that needs to change in this respect, but the ways of thinking of those who permanently 'overhaul' society and try **to model** it according to counter-productive technocratic concepts of governance that only serves the unbalanced interests of the 'happy' few. As long as control over policy implementation remains in the hands of those who control methods and performance measures through process management, the *normative universe of 'cost efficiency'* will continue to frustrate indispensable *governmental services to the public and the public interest*.

Despite all the euphoria, the neoliberal social order, conceived as 'modern' administrative and economic *management*, has become outdated more quickly than many a theorist and party ideologue had imagined. Time may be running away (and catching up with things quickly), but unfortunately it does not always heal all wounds. With national or regional policy-matters concerning the well-being of citizens there is evidently more at stake than just the position of (individual) politicians or electoral support of political parties. The purport - which for that matter is being denied a lot – concerns nothing less than the *bankruptcy* of the neoliberal ideology as an economic and social model. After 40 years of neoliberal policy dominance, it has become clear that an overriding focus on a market society has done more harm than good and that this model completely disrupts the *institutional social order*. The many promises made to citizens have not been fulfilled. And that is not so much a matter of a lacking 'free will' but foremost of lacking *choice*, for there has been a *systematic decline in services and securities*. that citizens certainly not have asked for, nor 'welcome'. That tide will not be turned with a few 'adjustments', however 'progressive' they may be framed. The administrative and policy *regression* has turned out to be too sizeable for that. But as long as executed policies are considered 'OK', or *beyond any reasonable doubt* anyway, and citizens on the other hand are simply 'no good' because they lack the 'right attitudes', there surely is 'something wrong'. At least, this seems to be the motto of all those who believe that political actions are not (directly) connected to *societal consequences* and consequently they do not have to be accountable for them. In case of 'irregularities' [sic] they simply brush aside any responsibility, as if it concerns completely *separate* worlds. How could it possibly be that 'civic trust' is so problematic...? Well, when it is the intention to avoid any true political debate, one should not be suprised that really *diverging* worlds emerge. This is exactly what happens if citizens are treated as if they should be 'managed' paternalistically. Then they will turn against such pedantry and will ulti-mately reject all 'responsibility' themselves as well.

'Dancing with wolves'

Perspectives can therefore only be meaningful if they are preceded by thorough analysis and if presented vistas are based on realism. Idealism *as such* is often insufficient. Therefore our recommendation would be: *beware of wolves in sheep's clothing* who claim all sorts of things about human rights, equality and 'inclusiveness', but in the meantime are all too keen on implementing *their own* reactionary agendas in a most refined way.

Philosophy as such is also abused for such purposes, as there are many academics who, for the sake of positional interests (and/or financial support), show themselves to be too compliant and too unwilling to support realistic opinions and ways of thinking that promote real progress. Running with the pack (or 'the devil' for that matter) may suggest an 'up to date' attitude, but ultimately it changes nothing. (But this is apparently also the implicit, but mostly unspoken intention).

For the Dutch economist and Nobel laureate Tinbergen (and many a follower inspired by him), however, it was crystal clear when he stated that without broad (global) *addressing of subsistence and inequality issues* there could be *no prospect of real progress*.⁴⁸ That is quite something else than constantly wanting to wash one's hands of such responsibilities, or distancing oneself from them in a rather hypocritical manner. Promoting (more) humane conditions, that is what it is all about in the broadest sense. As stated before, not just in words, but especially in deeds. Formulated principles in international human rights treaties offer sufficient leads for this. But without *political will*, there is no way. The neoliberal pathway is in any case a dead end one.

Concluding remarks – '*kry dharma in die issues*'

Neoliberalism has appeared to be a perverse ideology, as it rigidly benefits market interests above societal matters and interests and principles of good (rightful) governance. Clinging on to advocated austerity and 'adaptation' programs does not favor society, but serve foremost financial-economic interests of oligopolistic power structures and are clearly not beneficial to (the interests of the) general public. Therefore an ideology that is clearly *unable* to tackle mechanisms and issues of deprivation but instead *creates* them to a significant degree, is not a suitable set of thoughts and orientations to *serve the public* in a justifiable way.⁴⁹

The *paradigm shifts* that have led, in parallel and in conjunction, to the transformation of the (Dutch) welfare state and ultimately to the 'participation society' as it is envisaged in policy terms, relate to *ideological, economic and geopolitical, technological and political-social* domains. The contexts concern (i) the emergence of *New Public Management* (NPM) in public administration, (ii) the '*end of ideology and history*' concept (as argued, by Fukuyama and within *postmodern deconstructivism* by Foucault), (iii) as well as the *capability approach* (as originally developed and taken up by Sen and his followers), all of which have *converged* in neoliberalism on the basis of former corporatistic, utilitarian-meritocratic and market-economic models of society and through which this ideology has taken off in the past decades and become dominant in policy terms. These conceptual developments regarding the political, social and economic order have guided the *shift from civil rights to 'duties'* and the *transformation of the social security system as the core of the welfare state*. This transformation coincides significantly with the period of the *digital informatization revolution*, which, while increasing labor productivity (and cost efficiency⁵⁰), made labor participation problematic and propelled the *overall technocratisation* of public administration.

The welfare state (*social security state*) was a unique *Western-European* construction, which the US (in spite of Roosevelt's efforts with his planned *Second Bill of Rights*) never have been able to implement. Therefore an American way of 'doing things' is not suitable for just governmental policy, as well as 'the American example' has continuously shown to be a wrong one in many ways. Constitutional and structural social-economical inequality, poverty and separatism for instance, are surely no matters that civilised societies can be proud of, or boast about. Let alone that 'personal liberty' would be a 'self-evident' matter because that is simply 'what is constitutionally established'.

Neoliberalism as a *regressive ideological concept* for modern societies is clearly on its way out, despite its advocates' refusal to admit this. The more they cling to their doubtful beliefs, the more it will become clear that societies don't benefit from the supposed advantages in the way it has been proclaimed over the years by politicians, their electoral flock and many 'advisors' alike. Neoliberalism and performed neoliberal policies have not been able to meet and fulfil the economical and societal expectations that were said to be 'self-evident', as if mixed economical societies and their citizens

never had seen better times during the period of *balanced market and governmental powers*. This balance was completely shattered by the rise of 'new public management' that accompanied the rise of neoliberalism during the eighties and onwards. The lasting denial of this historical development has caused the overall ideological *Babel*-like confusion we still are confronted with to the present day. In spite of the fact that quite some critical scholars have pointed to the unnecessary 'inevitability' of such a 'confusion', there are still many who believe otherwise, as they evidently are unable – or unwilling – to pinpoint and grasp the essential import of the matter in its full context. We have shown that the notion that citizens and societies benefit from the (market) concepts that have been advocated over time is unsound, because it is based on premises that are hardly ever realized. At least as far as livelihood opportunities and securities, such as employment, health care, housing, welfare and social (income) security are concerned. The far-reaching *policy changes* that took place in the Netherlands and other countries during the 1980s and 1990s, and the *social consequences* of which are still being felt on a daily basis, are more than disconcerting in this regard. Citizens are not as 'autonomous' as they are portrayed to be, since citizens remain dependent at all times. Be it from the government, as during the heyday of the welfare state, in recent decades they have become increasingly dependent on the (financial capital) market and its entrepreneurs. 'Self-empowerment' and employing 'capabilities' have acquired a more than sour connotation in the face of governmental withdrawal. This ideology has robbed citizens of their rightful position and loaded them with 'responsibilities' that are in conflict with the established *social contract*. The problem thus extends considerably further than the (philosophical) debate about man and (his) 'nature', human nature, or natural disasters that befall man. It concerns above all *political-ideological orientations* with respect to the overall organization of societies (*fundamental ordering issues*). As long as these are not (adequately) addressed by politicians and their advisors, it will mostly remain 'fiddling on the margins' which will not release citizens from their oppressed positions. In this respect it would be advisable that young people in particular (and their political think tanks) are made fully aware of this and are enabled to take note of relevant developments in this field, in order to fill in the gaps caused by a lingering 'historical amnesia'. In our opinion a not to be underestimated *Bildungs*-assignment of the first order. Because anyone who strongly *identifies* with neoliberalism should not be surprised to become irremediably infected himself with this virus which is presented and promoted as an undisputable blueprint for a 'healthy' society. There will certainly be no recovery from this with 'soft healers' who also often turn out to be neo-liberals in disguise.

Furthermore neoliberal and (especially) regressive *neocorporatist* orientations are largely based on an *assumed* democratic order that hardly exists. At least not in the way it is presented as far as the (political and democratic) 'participation possibilities' of citizens are concerned. Citizens, despite the propagated opposite, can, in or with their 'communities', hardly constitute a *solid counterforce* against expanding administrative arbitrariness and fragmenting decentralization policies that erode governmental responsibilities and obligations. To restore this imbalance, it is foremost needed to abandon such *apolitical* (or rather *anti-political*) societal concepts and to return to a constitutional order in which citizens' position as *political* actors is fully respected and taken seriously. Therefore it is essential that their interests as ***first and foremost stakeholders*** are not being left to the 'exploitative mercy' of random third parties. This is not a matter of 'self-reliance', 'altruism', or 'benefaction', but of *political clarity and accuracy* and above all: *trustworthy consistency*. It is therefore no coincidence that recent research has shown that public confidence in local (municipal) government has plummeted in recent years. Just as, incidentally, trust in the national government has fallen dramatically. Everything has a price, not least complacency and (apparent) 'untouchability'.

Neoliberalism has proven not to be a suitable ideology for societies, as it is mainly based on *illusory concepts* of free market competition, profit maximization, welfare and well-being. Without targeted political-administrative interference by governments, there is no distribution of wealth. At least not a fair one and certainly not if those same governments allow themselves to be led by parallel *business concepts* and outsource their *responsibilities to market parties*, such as insurance companies, real estate operators and a myriad of counseling bodies and 'entrepreneurs' of all kind. Then *institutional foundations* on which societies are based erode and arbitrariness and short-term interests prevail.

However neoliberal market ideology, with all its moralistic connotations, has become so *all-encompassing* that it seems almost unfeasible to refute this constellation of concoctions. Yet this will have to be done consistently and unremittingly in order to be able to call a halt to the collective madness in which people and societies have manoeuvred themselves. (If only '*for God's sake*'). It is therefore not so surprising that the support for (ideological) social and polity criticism comes mainly from people in (so called) *developing countries*, because exactly *there* one is confronted like no other with the consequences of such concoctions. The unbridled *exploitation* of man, his conditions of existence and living environment has become 'totalitarian' and the boundless shamelessness with which 'truths of life' are vented that are supposed to 'justify' such exploitation is so drastic and far-reaching, that even former ethnocentric exploitation systems of colonialism are overshadowed. The worldwide acceptance of 'unquestionable economic truths' by the ones who benefit at the cost of many others is a serious undermining of any 'progress' in human sense. 'Charity' may begin at home, but the struggle against subversive structures is a *joint* one that clearly transcends such boundaries. In order to be able to *dismantle* economic and financial power structures and to establish a *sound balance in life chances*, one cannot sit by and close one's eyes infinitely. There individualistic 'capability-approaches' fail completely, as they put the wrong 'responsibilities' in the hands of people that have no fair chance at all to counterweight such structures. To this end *fundamental polity change* is needed urgently — even much more than rather oblique notions of 'climate change', as this will not establish better life chances whatsoever. *Inequality* simply cannot be fought by maintaining unequal positions at full length. Such issues of political orientation, despite all the 'good intentions' of 'concerned' people, are still far too little realized, let alone translated into action. Instead, 'navel- and stargazing' have become the collective *cosmetic and cosmic illusions* that deprive people of many a chance of life's happiness and fulfillment (as Moses, Plato, Erasmus, Spinoza and others already knew in their own way).

In short, we are dealing with a rearguard action in which the question should no longer be *whether*, and in which respects, neoliberalism is a disastrous ideology that urgently needs to be replaced by more balanced concepts of governance and policy in the interest of societies as a whole rather than being purely profitable for the happy few, but rather *how* such an alternative can actually be *(re)constructed*. The former welfare state, largely lost to neoliberal policies, can still serve as an excellent guideline in this regard. A carefully maintained *ideological silence* is not conducive to open discursive relations as far as the organisation and polity of the State is concerned. This kind of political fearfulness turns against itself. Therefore, when considering ideological consequences it's not just about 'theory', but moreover about *practise*. That's an important and not to be underestimated or neglected academic responsibility as well. Not only for critical researchers in- or outside the academic mainstream-flow. In other words: '*kry dharma in die issues*' [get some *dharma* in those issues⁵¹].⁵² To this purpose the following words of South-African poet Pieter Uys may serve as an appeal and a warning at the same time:

Woorde

[Words]

ek dry handel met woorde

[I trade with words]

soos ander met muntstukke

[like others with coins]

tjeks of byekorwe; woorden dreun

[cheques or bee-hives; words buzz and hum]

dreigend soos bye in korwe

[threatening like bees in their hives]

pasop dat jou woorde

[beware that your words]

jou niet steek nie, benewens

[don't stab you, besides]

die pyn is sommige giftig

[the pain is poisonous to some]

woorde is uiters gevaarlik

[words are very dangerous]

soms soek hulle mekaar uit

[sometimes they select each other]

gaan lê langs mekaar en paar

[live alongside each other and mate]

en dan het jy gesê

[and then you have said]

wat jy nie bedoel het nie

[what you did not mean to say]

— Pieter-Dirk Uys [transl. vdK] ⁵³

..-.-.

Notes

- ¹ Fletcher, R. On Exactitude in Social Science: A Multidimensional Proposal for Investigating Articulated Neo-liberalization and its 'Alternatives'. *Ephemera* 19(3), 2019: 537-564
- ² Van der Kooij, E. (in Dutch) *Burgers op drift. De Staat van vertwijfeling. Pathologie van een gedesoriënteerde samenleving* [Drifting citizens. The State of Despair. Pathology of a disoriented society] Vol. 1-3, Zwaag: Blacklabel Publishing|ISSR 2020. As I collaborated throughout my research with the highly esteemed, independently thinking and erudite (but sadly, much too soon deceased) professor Frans van Waarden (UU), it soon became clear to me that controversies over theoretical casuistry primarily are often rather 'academic' ones and that there is regularly more at stake than mere 'questions of definition'. Tacit and not seldom biased ideological orientations appear more 'common practise' than assumed. This blurs not only objective and distanced analytical views, but especially clear observations of social and political reality.
- ³ Among participants in this conference *Future of freedom* it was supposed that markets could look after themselves best without governmental interference. Welfare would spread automatically. After all 'communism' had proven to be a losing ideology, so it was assumed. (See Raymond Aron, *Nations and ideologies*, in: *The future of freedom*, Papers from the International Conference on the future on Freedom

convened by the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Milan, 1955. Sociologist and political philosopher Aron, being a liberal Atlantic protagonist, was one of the main organizers of this conference. See also Aron's *The End of Ideology and the Renaissance of Ideas*, in: *The Industrial Society. Three Essays on Ideology and Development*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) [1966]

- ⁴ The American Congress however had already rejected Roosevelt's outline to implement such as system (*Second Bill of Rights*, 1944)
- ⁵ Osborne, D. & T. Gaebler, *Reinventing Government*, 1992; Walsh, K. *Public services and market mechanisms – Competition, contracting and the New Public Management*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995; Wallis, J. (1999) and Dollery, B. *Market failure, government failure, leadership and public policy*. Palgrave Macmillan. A few additional notes on the background of NPM, for which we also rely on the expertise of Professor em. of public administration A. Korsten (Maastricht University).

According to Korsten, Osborne & Gaebler came up with their ten point plan, ten recommendations (or 'management principles') for a 'new-style government' that had to be more focused on a 'mission' [sic; vdK] (instead of rules), on what customers [sic] wanted, on achieving results, on promoting competition instead of holding on to a government monopoly, on utilizing the expertise and energy of civil servants, and that didn't have to do everything itself. Korsten notes: "Osborne and Gaebler have written a book with their bestseller '*Reinventing Government*' that is very reminiscent of a book that caused a stir in the management literature on business over a decade ago [since the nineties that is]. This is '*In Search of Excellence*', the book by McKinsey consultants Peters and Waterman (1982). That book has had a very great significance worldwide, both in everyday management practice and theoretically. Osborne and Gaebler wrote a book with similar impact but for the public sector." (Korsten, A. *New Public Management* on arnokorsten.nl) The crux of New public management (NPM) in Osborne & Gaebler's views comes down to:

"Governance must be reinvented. The government has to learn to steer again, not row; that is, do the work itself. It is necessary to formulate strategic objectives, to set priorities and to formulate assessment criteria, and then to see what the best mechanisms are for achieving them. Only where it has to, should government itself take charge of implementation. On many fronts, however, government should not act itself but stimulate activities of others. The government must generate momentum, mobilize people. In short: 'etrepeneurial spirit' is required from the government. 'Empowerment' is therefore a keyword that appears constantly in their book." (A. Korsten, *ibid*. Also: *Managementconcepten. Weloverwogen keuze of het volgen van grillige modes?* [Management concepts. Well-considered choice or following whimsical fashions?] onder verwijzing naar Hood, C., A new public management for all seasons. *Public Administration*, 1991, pp. 3-19; Hood, C. The 'New Public Management' in the 1980s: Variations on a theme. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, vol. 20, iss. 2-3, Feb-Apr, 1995: 93-109 (zie also Hood, C. *The art of the state – Culture, rhetoric and public management*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1998, as well as De Vries, J. en Van Dam, M. *Politiek-bestuurlijk management - Een blik achter de gouden muur* [Political-administrative management - A look behind the golden wall], 1998).

Here the key concept is (efficient) 'management', but that is *not identical* to, nor a sensible replacement for *public administration*. A completely *technocratic* approach with the suggestion of 'value neutral renewal' therefore. But what is actually so 'new' about the argument that priorities are set and policy choices are made in public administration, which always (and *by definition*) involve a balance between ends and means? Politics does not need to be 'reinvented', unless one has 'forgotten' what politics actually is or one no longer *wants* to know, because it is 'desirable' to 'separate' politics and government from each other. In fact, this has nothing to do with 'progressiveness', but with a blind spot that proves to be one big balloon.

According to Korsten this observation is consistent with a conclusion of Grüning who writes: "*Decisions about administrative structures are political questions and are closely related to political philosophy*" (Grüning, G. Origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management, *International Public Management Journal* 4, 2001: 1-25, 20). De Vries and Van Dam also point out in *Political-administrative management* (1998) that in practice a separation between politics and administration is neither possible nor useful. Entering into relations with third parties [in the market] would

moreover lead to a 'third party government' or an '*empty state*', or a '*kaleidoscopic government*' that constantly changes its composition and in which control and changes and within which control and responsibility processes are not very transparent. The The [government] initiative would thus be placed completely out of the hands of the government. (Korsten, *ibid.* Transl. vdK)

New public management (NPM) can therefore be summarized as follows :

The whole of analyses, ideas and recommended methods of public administration experts and other scientists about renewing the government in terms of a more (businesslike and) corporate way of working, *in casu* with more emphasis on results, performance measurement, decentralized responsibilities (contract management) and an alternative organization by placing government organizations at a distance, privatization, and promotion of competition and market functioning (Korsten, *ibid.* Transl. vdK).

Referring to Karsten and Van Veen (1998), Korsten recalls that since the 1980s, criticism has arisen within the government about the 'one-sided emphasis' [sic] on the *three R's of justice, legal protection and legal equality*, and that complementarity was desired with the *three E's of efficiency, effectiveness and simplicity* (as can be achieved with deregulation operations, among others), and concludes that such management concepts might meet managers' 'psychological need for predictability, certainty, grip, control and monitoring' and 'are sometimes also useful means to soften painful measures', but also (referring to Heusinkveld's dissertation on the transience of organizational concepts, Heusinkveld, S. *Surges and sediments: organization concepts between transience and continuity*, diss. VU, Amsterdam 2004) that renewal seems to have become a 'value in itself'. Ultimately, management concepts (as well as ideologies) turn out to be traced back to orientations regarding the function of public administration within perceived or desired models of society. This indicates precisely what the actual value of this diversity of concepts is, namely nothing more or less than a collection of views about the organization of society which is based on a wide range of assumptions and suppositions regarding causalities and laws which may or may not be supported by actual reality. Especially when this ideological dimension is abandoned or denied, management views and the claims that are made with regard to 'effective government and policy' acquire a shadowy and gratuitous character. This brings us full circle and we are back where it all started: how to organize society in such a way that citizens are optimally and as adequately as possible met in their legitimate needs and interests. Experience has shown that management concepts in relation to public administration are more of an obstacle than an 'asset'.

New Public Management amounted to deliberate *anti-statism* that arose primarily from opposition to 'collectivist orientations' that would 'threaten' the propagated (market) individualism. Particularly in the US this appeared to be a rather strange figure, since that country hardly has an *etatist* tradition. The roots are therefore deeper and go back to ideological controversies from the time of the *interbellum* (communism and fascism) and the time of the (dawning) *Cold War*. Emigrated European (foremost Russian) NPM-apologists and their children who fled from the collectivist violence and became U.S. residents, turned out to be hardened instigators of such views in which things were taken completely out of context and blown up to bizarre proportions. Any tendency toward *state intervention* was considered 'suspicious' and had to be categorically repressed. In this way the followers showed themselves to be just as much the victims of ideological derailment as their spokesmen.

One can observe and conclude that in this period (80's/early 90's) the seeds of administrative halfheartedness and political rudderlessness c.q. neglect and erosion of constitutional functions lie, which so many years later have to be 'compensated' through decentralization of government tasks to municipalities and 'citizen participation' (or ought to serve as a 'diversionary tactic' to mask these lacunae). For some all this went much too far, for others however apparently not far enough.

(Thorough) analyses were hardly needed (unless cursory and abrasive), because 'the case' was clear: the market had to be restored to its (alleged) splendour and the power of the ('unproductive' bureaucratic) government that had the market in its reins far too 'dirigiste' had to be reversed. The concepts embraced, however, all had in common that they did not so much strengthen *collective interests*, but rather that *state functions and public services* which ought to secure this were thought to be better tackled in a 'businesslike' manner. This, however, would be a disastrous route from an administrative and constitutional point of

view, as was emphasized from various sides. Nevertheless, the attack on the government and public administration was massive and unprecedented. The *financial shareholder model* replaced the communal *stakeholder model* of society in which citizens are the true and sole agents of the **politeia**.

All this sheds a (still) remarkable light on supposed 'state failure' approaches and the way in which such ideas were emulated in Western Europe. (For further analysis and elaborations on this subject see Van der Kooij 2020, vols II and III).

⁶ Although administrations of people like Blair, Kok and Schröder preferred to call their policies '*third way*' – meaning a hybrid (social-democratic) form between market-capitalism and (state-led) socialism – such an intermediate system was not so much 'new', but was foremost *dismantled* in favour of a *neoliberal shift* to the right as such mixed economical systems *already existed* during the era of the rising of welfare states. With this shift the original institutional welfare state and its social security system was largely abandoned under the pretext of governmental 'efficiency' and cost reduction. Drastic *austerity and privatization measures* were taken to the full. This major shift of orientations by various social-democratic parties was the essence of *the (ideological) crisis of the left* which still exists to the present day.

⁷ See note 5

⁸ Ignatieff, M. (2017) WRR-lecture *Open society: its old enemies and its new friends*, WRR The Hague, Nov. 28, 2017. (See also Van der Kooij, *More of the same, or true pluralism*, ISSR, Feb 17, 2021 on academia.edu)

⁹ Sterling-Folker, J. (2013) *Neoliberalism*, in: Dunne et al. *International Relations Theories*, Ch. 6, pp. 114-131, Oxford University Press (See Van der Kooij, *On Neoliberalism*, ISSR, March 10, 2021 on academia.edu)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bourdieu, P. *Contre-feux: Propos pour servir à la résistance contre l'invasion néolibérale*. Paris: Éditions Liber 1998

¹² 'L'essence du néolibéralisme'. *Le Monde diplomatique*, Mars 1998 (monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/03/bourdieu/10167)

¹³ Morrice, D. *Philosophy, Science and Ideology in Political Thought*, Palgrave MacMillan, 1996: 169 et seq. See also: Foley, M. and Edwards, B. The paradox of civil society, *Journal of democracy* 7 (3), pp. 38-52, 1996

¹⁴ As also outlined in our working paper *On Neoliberalism* (ISSR, March 2021). The current paper is a revised and extended version of the original draft.

¹⁵ Thorsen & Lie, 2006

¹⁶ See Van der Kooij 2020 and 2021 (Ibid.)

¹⁷ See note 5. As stated before, the advocates of NPM reject unconditionally the model of the social security state and an intervening government.

¹⁸ Thorsen & Lie (ibid.) 2006: 15

¹⁹ J. Stiglitz, *The New York Times*, Feb. 16 feb. and Oct. 13, 2013

²⁰ Polanyi, K. *The Great Transformation*. [1944] 2001, Foreword, vii-viii; x-xii

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- ²¹ Ibid. xiv
- ²² P. Krugman, *Who was Milton Friedman?* The New York Review of Books, 5 feb. 2007
- ²³ Nef, J. and Reiter, B. *The democratic challenge. Rethinking democracy and democratization*, 2009
- ²⁴ Van Apeldoorn, B. et al. (eds.) *Contradictions and limits of neoliberal European governance. From Lisbon to Lisbon*, 2009: 218
- ²⁵ Ibid. p.219
- ²⁶ The concentration of power may on first consideration seem rather complex and 'intangible', but in effect comes down to 'plain ordinary' mechanisms of *power acquiring and maintaining*. When such a concentration of power were to be addressed in this in this way, rather obsolete 'conspiracy thinking' would no longer need to be an (overall) issue.
- ²⁷ Likewise, also the NATO construction clearly appears to be such an obstacle, as this outdated relic of the *Cold War* clearly obstructs and clashes with notions of peace and security that place more emphasis on peaceful consultation and cooperation, rather than on military displays of (perceived) superiority. The *Berlin-Paris axis* proves, contrary to Atlanticists' claims, crucial to the EU's position in the world. The transatlantic military alliance forces participating countries to adopt an *ambivalent* position and particularly frustrates cooperation in the field of an independent *joint foreign policy*. This more or less holds the EU hostage and robs it of its autonomous and sovereign decision-making as long as there is no distancing from this process. That is why 'on the other side of the ocean' such a (possible) development is 'regarded with dismay' and everything is done to prevent (or obstruct) it. Then the propaganda machinery is running at full speed. (See Williams, J. *Atlanticism: The Achilles' Heel of European Security, Self-Identity and Collective Will*, Red Pepper Archive 1997, redpepper.org.uk. See also: *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database* at sipri.org Stockholm, to get acquainted with the enormous military expenditure worldwide).
- ²⁸ It might therefore be worthwhile to consider seriously issuing *party-political mandates* by the electorate more closely, so that the rather *noncommittal* - because as yet unspecified - mandate-provision is subject to *certain margins* in order to promote more transparency. Coalition formation (such as in the Netherlands) and premature policy making behind closed doors, which are then followed up under a *monistic regime*, leads to a *shadow play* in which not only parliament, but also the voter is largely sidelined. This undermines the legitimate basis of legislation and regulations and shrouds democratic decision making in an illusory haze of acceptance or 'unanimity' (consensus) among the population. Although it is true that the citizen's vote gives a (tacit) 'approval' for the policy conducted, however this vote - which in fact amounts to a 'blank cheque' - is subsequently used to provide the desired (but prematurely booked) 'legitimation' for policies that *are still to be implemented*. This legitimatisation façade undermines and impedes sound democratic relations, which can only be restored with a *more specified mandate in advance*. This could argue for a 'referendum democracy', were it not for the fact that this merely puts the cart before the horse, since democratic decision-making based on referenda can never be a workable alternative to parliamentary democracy. Referenda are foremost and above all too vulnerable to opportunistic (political and media) manipulation for that. Democracy should not be reduced to a 'permanent popularity poll', but must be provided with adequate legitimatisation. This is only possible by involving citizens more closely in decisionmaking and by granting them *real* opportunities to exercise influence. If not, democracy will eventually kill itself.

²⁹ Not so long ago, the main topic of the environmental discussion was the 'acidification' of soil, air and surface water. This (*over*)*eutrophication* at the expense of biodiversity was thought to be mainly attributable to excessive fertilization (ammonia) by the agricultural sector. Industrial air pollution (carbon dioxide, nitrogen) was not yet so clearly in focus. While many complicating factors of environmental pollution are lumped together under the current *nitrogen denominator*, the danger of this is that it renders the matter almost completely opaque. This is a problem for many people in all kinds of politico-social discussions about *who is responsible for what* and *who should pay for it in what way*. When, in the process, *emission rights* become the plaything of lucrative activities and generous *subsidy arrangements* can be used to clean up 'one's own backyard' at the community's expense, then the whole thing is out of control and society is in danger of being deprived of a clear view of the complex deterioration in nature's *absorption capacity*. Rigid, dogmatic and fundamentalist approaches are not conducive to a clear understanding of the subject matter, but merely boost selective propagandistic aims and push populist views and perceptions to unprecedented disordering levels.

Nitrogen (N₂) by itself is a colorless and odorless gas that is omnipresent in nature. Approximately 78% of all air consists of nitrogen. It is only when nitrogen combines with other substances that compounds are formed that can be harmful to humans and the environment, such as *nitrogen oxides* (NO_x - a compound of nitrogen and oxygen) and *ammonia* (NH₃ - a compound of nitrogen and hydrogen). Also *nitrates* are nitrogen compounds that are part of the nitrogen cycle and play a role in the use of fertilizers. In plant physiology, nitrates normally meet the nitrogen requirements of the plant, since nitrogen is an indispensable element for the production of amino acids in plants (in turn, the raw materials for protein synthesis). In addition, *nitrogen reduction* takes place during natural fires and combustion processes such as in (combustion) boilers and engines. Nitrate reduction occurs through plant uptake, washout from abundant rainfall, and through denitrification resulting from poor soil structures. With denitrification, nitrate disappears back into the atmosphere in the form of atmospheric nitrogen, which, while 'completing' the nitrogen cycle, nevertheless remains *out of balance* when pollutant emissions continuously remain unabated.

³⁰ These 'adjustments' (notably in the direction toward an advocated 'participatory society' that should *replace* the social security state !) would then be essentially 'self-directed', as if there were a more or less '*natural adaptive capacity*' (Hemerijck, a.o.), which is as gratuitously as it is ideologically biased in spite of the *apolitical* way such orientations are presented. It is well-known – but yet significantly – that many a Dutch scientific researcher tries to impress the outside (mainly Anglo-saxon) world with reflections on (claimed) Dutch '(polder)successes', but which on closer examination turn out not to be a success at all in many respect. The matter of *bias* however remains an obstinate one for any researcher as long as such imputations are not substantiated and provided with valid (counter)arguments. A persistently maintained 'ideological silence' surely does not provide 'thrust and parry', let alone it substantiates its own justification of rightness.

³¹ Gergen, K. Pragmatics and pluralism in explaining human action, in: *Behavior and philosophy*, Vol. 37, 2009: 127-133 (128)

³² *Ongekend Onrecht*, Verslag Parlementaire ondervragingscommissie Kinderopvangtoeslag, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Kamerstuk 35 510, 17 dec. 2020 [*Unprecedented Injustice*, Report of the Parliamentary Interrogation Committee on Childcare Allowance, Lower House of the States General, Parliamentary Paper 35 510, Dec. 17, 2020] (https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20201217_eindverslag_parlementaire_ondervragingscommissie_kinderopvangtoeslag.pdf)

³³ Dutch prime minister Lubbers stated in his time that society was 'sick' and that citizens needed to be 'reactivated' in a socio-economic sense. There were 'too few incentives' for unemployed people and those dependent on benefits to 'decide' to actively participate in the labour market. People (especially the

younger ones) preferred to 'stay at home on the couch', was the leading thought expressed by Lubbers' Finance Minister Ruding in 1984. If there was a question of a 'disease', one may wonder whether the 'diagnosis' (and remedy) had been made correctly at the time. Especially when one considers that Lubbers proceeded to make large-scale cuts in collective spending, which put even more pressure on employment at the time and put social security under severe pressure.

"People are not easily prepared to accept a job somewhere else [...] They prefer to stay close to 'Auntie Truus'. [...] In that respect, the economy in America is much better. You have to give people an incentive to get out of trouble. [...] We've been going backwards for ten years [...]. One of the things you see then is the insanely high absenteeism, which fortunately is now declining slightly. [...] Then we have to come to the conclusion: the degree of self-discipline of mankind [sic] is apparently in some respects on the low side in the Netherlands compared to our competitors. [...] There is still some room for improvement in Public Health. It is a shame that so many pills are obtained that are later thrown in the garbage can. [...] That dichotomy [in terms of income] is just made up, invented to have a slogan. Increasing income differences is necessary. Otherwise people will say: I'll just sit quietly behind the television." (O. Ruding in daily newspaper *Het Vrije Volk*, Oct. 18, 1984).

The suggestion emanating from Ruding's remarks turned out to have set a very questionable tone, which combined with the questioning of the integrity of medical examiners at the time, placed the unemployment and work disability discussion in questionable light. Despite the insult to the involuntarily unemployed, Lubbers and Ruding and their Liberal-Christiandemocratic coalition advocated an American-oriented approach to economic (budget) policy by analogy with Reagan's and Thatcher's neoconservative political agenda, which successive House majorities subsequently adopted in spite of expressed criticism of the 'Auntie Truus approach'. With subsequent market economy policies, this orientation was continued under 'purple' (neoliberal) governments and elevated to a leading ideological orientation. The unemployed citizen was no longer the *victim* of destabilizing business and market developments, but to a large extent the *cause* of them. Eventually, years later, this led to an unprecedented rigid 'tit for tat' policy, as a result of which countless citizens were unjustly dismissed (and trapped) by the government as 'fraudsters'. An issue with far-reaching political and social consequences that has still not been dealt with properly.

- ³⁴ During the politically polarised seventies the progressive social-democratic cabinet Den Uyl was in charge (1973-1977), which was considered to have been executing a 'socialist' policy programme. In reality this was a rather diverse coalition of social-democrats (PvdA), social-liberals (D66), progressive (ex-)christian-democrats (PPR) and completed with some politicians from the (protestant and catholic) christian-democratic parties (ARP and KVP) that supported the cabinet (but were no official part of it). For right-wing liberals however, this – albeit a 'pentatonic' – coalition was nothing less than a '*complete take-over*' of the left with 'devastating consequences' for the Dutch economy. They had to grind their teeth, but intended to 'take revenge' rather sooner than later. In contrast to such rhetoric, the carried out programma appeared to be *de facto* rather moderate in many aspects. For instance the coalition elaborated on *welfare and social security arrangements* that already had been largely implemented by preceding cabinets (notably of social and christian-democratic signature, which combination held vast electoral majorities as the liberals did not yet constitute a significant political force. This however changed rapidly during the eighties when unemployment rates rose sky-high as a result of increasing *globalized competition by low-wage countries*. Nevertheless the *blaim* for the 'need for austerity measures' was one-sided and solely put on the ones who had *lost their jobs*, as they were said to be 'too lazy' to work and prefer to 'choose' [sic] for welfare. This improper and rather viscious *causal twist* then took on a life of its own and became a mangled 'truth' in itself). Moreover, prime minister Den Uyl himself was a (profound) economist who knew all the ins and outs and was the last person to deal carelessly with public money. It turned out that the ideology of *wealth distribution* and an *intervening government* were the key-issues that did not appeal to the market liberals. Hence, at the dawn of a new decade, 'reaganomics', 'thatcherism' and 'new public management' were fully welcomed and embraced by them and who were joined by many (resented) others, who nevertheless were largely unaware of the 'Trojan horse' they were bringing into the house. The 'counter-attack' was taken to

the full anyway (as many aggrieved people in the UK were urged to 'take their country back' during the *Brexit*-controversy later on).

³⁵ Jacobs, B. Het beleidsdebat over welvaart mist theoretische fundering [The policy debate on prosperity lacks theoretical foundation] *Economisch Statistische Berichten* (ESB), 106 (4800S) pp.034-039, 26 augustus 2021 (Read the full article on: <https://esb.nu/esb/20066004/het-beleidsdebat-over-welvaart-mist-theoretische-fundering>)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Nachtwey, O. *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft. Ueber das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne*, 2016: 74-75

³⁸ Ibid. p.76

³⁹ Habermas, J. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1995 [1981] quoted in Nachtwey (ibid. p.72)

⁴⁰ Nachtwey, ibid. p.78

⁴¹ Ibid. p.86-87; Nachtwey notes that the term 'Teufelsmühle' was used by Karl Polanyi to describe the first great wave of creating markets, that eventually led to liberal capitalism during the 19th century and eroded social institutions and their possibilities for integration (see *The Great Transformation; The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, 1995 [1944]).

Since *Great Transformation* was written in 1944 and Polanyi died in 1964, he could hardly have foreseen nor surveyed the consequences of the postwar welfare state and the neoliberal transformation that followed later. Nevertheless, Polanyi leaves no doubt that '*the failure of the market Utopia*' lies at the heart of this erosion and that '*liberal economy gave a false direction to our ideals*' (Polanyi, 1995 [1944]: 227; 266).

⁴² Zie Van der Kooij 2020

⁴³ The more oddly it is to observe how far the United Kingdom as *founding fathers* of the welfare system (Beveridge) have moved away from its original approaches of the welfare state. The consequences of the policies of Thatcher(ism) and Blair are striking in this regard and, as in other societies that have had to deal with neoconservative-neoliberal policies, are unabated.

⁴⁴ Brinkmann, S. *Diagnostic Cultures: A cultural approach to the pathologization of modern life*, Routledge 2016/2020

⁴⁵ See also Van Houdt and Schinkel (2009)

⁴⁶ See for instance elaborate commentary given by the former vice-president of the Dutch State Council, Tjeenk Willink.

⁴⁷ Kjaer, P. and N. Olsen (eds.) *Critical theories of crisis in Europe. From Weimar to the euro*. London/new York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016

⁴⁸ See Tinbergen, J. *Shaping the World Economy: Suggestions for an International Economic Policy* Rotterdam University Press (1965) [1962] (eur.nl); (1976) Rapport aan de Club van Rome. *Futures: the journal of policy, planning and futures studies* 1/1 (NIEO-declaration) (eur.nl), as well as *RIO: Reshaping the International Order: A Report to the Club of Rome* (1976). New York: E.P. Dutton

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- ⁴⁹ 'Market failure' is immanent and omnipresent in the actual neoliberal political-economic order, as is the case with the labor market, the housing market and health care and social security 'markets'. All these markets get completely out of hand in terms of rigid demand, supply and price regimes, while governments categorically fail - and also refuse - to intervene and set limits to numerous disruptive excesses. Commercial exploitation is systematically at the expense of (affordable and accessible) *public services*. Also the public space is becoming completely fragmented under the exploitation of greedy entrepreneurs. The market is not a 'self-governing' or 'adjusting' mechanism and certainly not a 'panacea' or substitute for properly channeling social interests and necessities of life.
- ⁵⁰ This allowed *Silicon Valley* gurus to imagine themselves as self-appointed innovative avant-garde progressives and 'autonomous liberators' of a 'bygone era'.
- ⁵¹ Although the originally Indian Hindu/Buddhist concept of «dharma» implies *content, substance, spirit-power (fortitudo)*, as well as *virtue* (righteousness) and *justice*, in management circles, many non-Western philosophies of life are frequently flirtingly bandied about, while the *purport* - and especially the *practical impact* - of such orientations escapes most people and is greatly lost. At least, they are used almost exclusively in a *rhetorical* sense to make (an all too obvious) good impression with marketing ideas that are merely aimed at plain efficiency goals and increased profitability. A consequence of the culture of 'navel-gazing' that took flight in the West during the 1970s. Taking 'the right path' is therefore not an 'optional' thing, but involves a focused and dedicated (social) mission.
- ⁵² Line from: *Peter...kap aan*. Ode by Marius Titus on the occasion of the 70th birthday of the South African poet and writer Peter James Snyders, Dec. 4, 2009 (See also: Willem Fransman jr., Peter James Snyders: *G'n ordinary mens*, Referaat gelewer op Saterdag 28 November 2009 Tydens *Vyfde Versindaba*: Oude Libertas Stellenbosch, op versindaba.co.za – 'n Weblog vir die Afrikaanse digkuns)
- ⁵³ Taken from: Pieter-Dirk Uys, *Piepstem van Tagtig. Lierike uit literêre tydskrifte 1981-1988*, Bedfordview: Pommer Pers, 1993

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