

How the Netherlands got a green heart and lost it again.¹

The Green Heart in travel accounts

In 1848 the Groningen farmer Jan Freerks Zijlker was elected to the Dutch House of Representatives. During his first year in the House he kept a diary which was later published.² In this diary he also describes the weekend trips he took. On most occasions he had to remain in the west of the country because there was no train connection with the north and the other means of transport were very slow. As a farmer he paid special attention to the countryside. We do not have many accounts of the Dutch countryside because most descriptions of the countryside were made by travellers from Holland visiting other provinces, while people from abroad confined themselves to the towns.

Zijlker, for instance, travelled by train from the Hague to Rotterdam. He was not very impressed by the landscape, which he considered very poor in comparison to Groningen's clayey fields.³ Other travellers were of the same opinion. The Rotterdam vicar J. Craandijk, who at the end of the 19th century crisscrossed the whole country and wrote many books about his travels, defined the area around Gouda as a boring landscape, set too low and with strange, rather untidy pasture.⁴ However, in the 20th century this area was to become an icon of the Dutch landscape, the famous Green Heart, which was to be preserved immaculately forever.

Zijlker and Craandijk preferred the rural estates in the dunes and along the River Vecht, which were founded from the 17th century on by rich merchants from Amsterdam. Nevertheless, they expressed different opinions on nature. Zijlker's vision was utilitarian. Nature was created for mankind to cultivate. The vision of Craandijk was arcadian-paradisiacal. He preferred man-made landscapes in which nature was reduced to civilised proportions in harmony with the built environment – ponds as metaphors for lakes, groups of trees as metaphors for forests and hills suggesting mountains. This vision made no sharp distinction between culture and nature.⁵

At the end of the century, however, culture and nature were set against each other. The industrialisation of the Netherlands was in full swing, agriculture was

¹ A Dutch version of this article is published in *BMGN The Low Countries Historical Review* (2006) 753–771.

² 'Het dagboek van Jan Freerks Zijlker, met inleiding door dr. W.J. Formsma', *Groningse Volksalmanak voor het jaar 1948*, 81–221.

³ 'Dagboek Jan Freerks Zijlker', 127.

⁴ J. Craandijk, *Wandelingen door Nederland* (Third edition, Zuid Holland) (Haarlem 1888) 2.

⁵ These kinds of visions of nature are explained in Pim Kooij, *Mythen van de groene ruimte* (Wageningen 1999).



First issue of 'De levende natuur' (collection author)

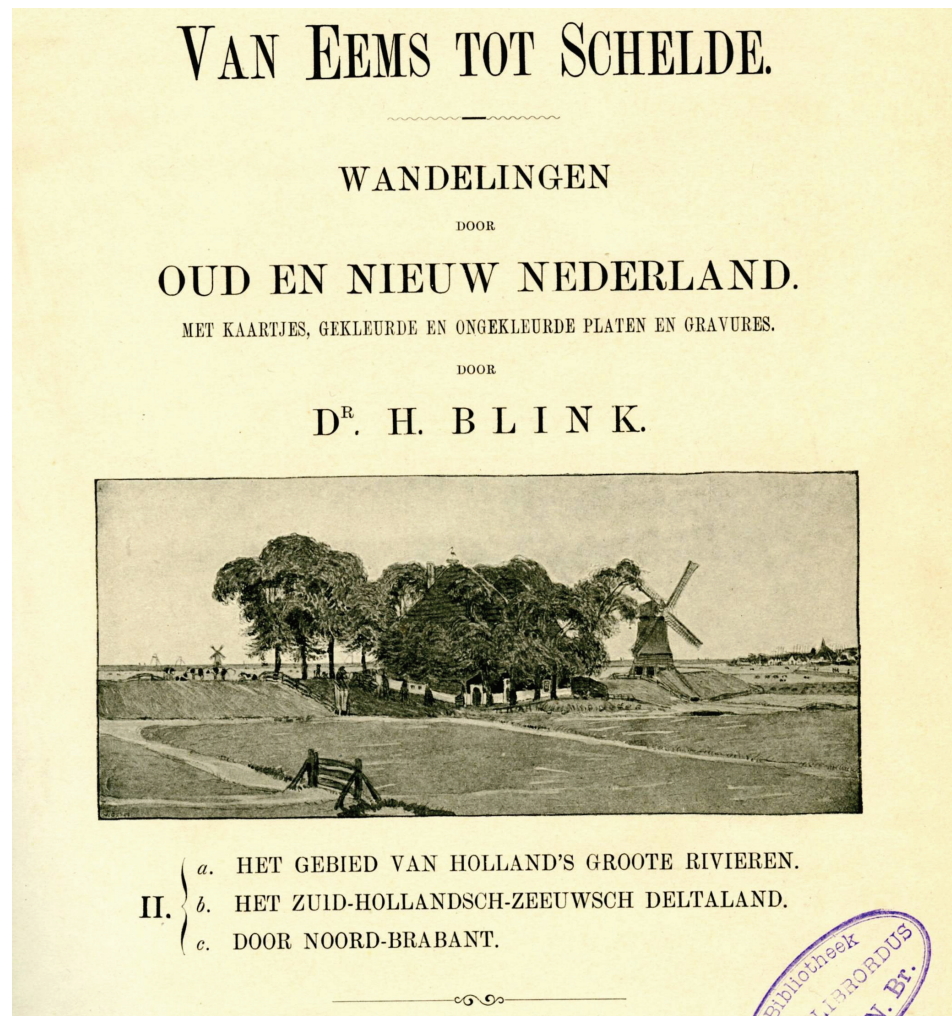
booming and required new areas, railways crossed the countryside and the deformation of towns created opportunities for the rapid extension of these towns. Growing numbers of people feared that what was left of nature would disappear completely and founded organisations for the protection of nature, plants and animals.

Along with this nature preservation movement, a third vision of nature was formed, one which I will term nature-emphatic. People were no longer content with dried plants and stuffed animals but wanted to experience living nature. They wanted to become acquainted with nature by moving into it. Journals such as *De Levende Natuur* (the living nature) edited by the teachers Eli Heimans and Jac. P. Thijsse acted as guides.

This preoccupation with living nature drew attention away from the appreciation of man-made landscapes, although not completely. The first purchases of the Dutch National Trust (*Vereeniging tot Behoud van Natuurmonumenten*) for the greater part consisted of country estates whose appearance was more or less natural. However, people sharing the nature-emphatic vision did not have much appreciation for the later Green Heart. They preferred the more natural areas in the east of the country, the dunes and the larger rivers. The titles of the famous Verkade albums, which for the greater part were written by Thijsse, reflect this. These were albums published by the Verkade factory – producers of chocolate, biscuits etc. – who provided illustrations for the albums packed along with their products. In 1911 Thijsse wrote the album *De bonte wei* (the colourful meadow), which hardly contained any observations on the polders of the later Green Heart. He collected his examples from elsewhere. Nonetheless, there is an album by Thijsse on the River Vecht – which is located in this area – and

one of his last albums, *Waar wij wonen* (where we live), from 1937 has an enormous cloudy sky on its cover, an image which was later exclusively associated with the Green Heart.

Therefore, this new nature-emphatic approach initially inspired no particular appreciation for the Green Heart, a negativity shared by Dutch travellers with an arcadian vision in the early twentieth century. The geographer H. Blink, who wrote the four volume *Van Eems tot Schelde* (from Eems to Scheldt) is their most outspoken representative.⁶ He especially disliked the Rhine, which is redu-



Blink, *Van Eems tot Schelde* (collection author)

⁶ H. Blink, *Van Eems tot Schelde. Wandelingen door oud en nieuw Nederland*. 4 volumes (Amsterdam, 1902-1906).

ced from a majestic river to a ditch, and the monotonous polders.⁷ Even in 1941, F. Koster in his book *Ons schoone land* (our beautiful country) does not spare much attention for the polder landscape.

The appreciation of the man-made landscape

We can conclude that appreciation for the central green polder landscape which comprises parts of the provinces of North and South Holland and Utrecht, was fairly limited until well into the 20th century. This leads us to ask what the popular landscapes actually were, and how and why this depreciation of the polder landscape disappeared?

It is useful to review accounts made by foreigners when determining which landscapes were popular, because they made their observations from a greater distance. The famous Italian globetrotter Edmondo de Amicis, who travelled in the Netherlands in 1873–74, was very explicit. The urban forest of the Hague was the top.⁸ Polders in his view were characteristic but monotonous. Another well-known foreign traveller, Henry Havard of France, who regularly visited the Netherlands at about the same period, especially liked the towns and the water – the larger rivers and the Zuider Zee. He often travelled by boat.⁹

The waterfront was also Blink's favourite: 'Do not visit the Drachenfels, Schwarzwald or Schaffhausen, before you have seen the rivers of Holland'.¹⁰ He and other writers also liked ponds and lakes, with the Naardermeer rated first among them, the first purchase made by *Natuurmonumenten*. There was also admiration expressed for dunes and woods. It is quite clear that Moorland was not much appreciated. There was also a general appreciation of southern Limburg, which was considered rather exotic.

Henny van der Windt describes how the boundaries of the major natural areas in the Netherlands started to be fixed around 1930.¹¹ This was carried out by a commission consisting of representatives of a number of organisations in the fields of nature conservation and recreation. In 1939 this commission published a report which assigned more than 700 areas.¹² Additionally, a small number of regions were designated for complete conservation: South Limburg, the Veluwe, the Achterhoek parts of the provinces of Overijssel and Friesland, the Dunes and the Lakes of Holland. Only the Lakes of Holland were situated in the later Green Heart. About half of the areas specified in the list were purchased by the government.

⁷ Blink, *Van Eems tot Schelde*, vol. I 173–182, vol. II 45.

⁸ Edmondo de Amicis, *Nederland en zijn bewoners* (First edition 1876, this edition Utrecht/Antwerpen, 1985) 94.

⁹ H. Havard, *La Hollande pittoresque: voyage aux villes mortes du Zuiderzée* (Paris, 1874).

¹⁰ Blink, *Van Eems tot Schelde*, vol. 2, 145.

¹¹ Henny van der Windt, *En dan: wat is natuur nog in dit land? Natuurbescherming in Nederland 1880-1990* (Amsterdam/Meppel, 1995) Chapter 4.

¹² G.A. Brouwer, H. Cleynert, W.G. v.d. Kloot, J.P. Thijsse and T. Weevers, *Het voornaamste natuurschoon in Nederland* (1939).

Man-made landscapes in the sense of areas destined for agrarian production were almost absent. There were, however, some members of the commission, especially the biologist H. Cleyndert, who wondered if some cultivated land-



One of the famous Verkade Albums by Jac. P. Thijssse (collection author)

landscapes did not possess some natural value. To discuss this problem, the 'cultivated landscapes' discussion group was founded in 1943. Cleyndert had the chair and one of its members was the biologist/ecologist Victor Westhoff, who was to become an authority in this field. After the war this group published a list of landscapes which needed protection. The list contained sixty-three areas, most of them located around villages in the east of the country. The main criterion for inclusion in the list was the extent to which these landscapes were endangered. Since there was no threat to the polder landscapes, they were absent from the list. However, we may speculate whether they would have been included if this had been the case.¹³

After 1950 a new perspective on man-made landscapes was developed. The Land Consolidation Act of 1954 stimulated the renovation of large parts of the Netherlands. Initially, absolute priority was given to agriculture to achieve food security.¹⁴ Organisations in the fields of recreation and nature protection were forced into a defensive position. Perhaps this resulted in the formation of less rigid opinions on the boundary between nature and culture in nature-emphatic people. Man-made landscapes, which were now under threat, also deserved protection.¹⁵ It was admitted that there were no purely natural landscapes left in the Netherlands, every area being subjected to human influence. There was only a differentiation in the intensity of cultivation. In this context the term natural value gained relevance, especially in the 1970s. This category combined scientific elements such as authenticity, diversity and rarity, with attention for recreation and non-professional perceptions of nature and landscape. This softened the boundary between nature and culture.¹⁶

The invention of the Randstad

The debate on the primacy of agriculture and the relationship between nature and culture proved an impetus for the definition of the Green Heart as the iconic Dutch landscape. However, before I begin formulating an answer to the second question on the popularity of the polders and the Green Heart set out above, I have to introduce the Dutch Randstad because the Green Heart started as the heart of the Randstad, later to become the heart of the Netherlands as a whole.

The term Randstad was probably used for the first time around 1930 by aviation pioneer and first director of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Albert Plesman.¹⁷ From the air he noticed a semicircle of towns in green surroundings. Some

¹³ Van der Windt, *En dan: wat is natuur*, 120.

¹⁴ G. Andela, *Kneedbaar landschap, kneedbaar volk. De heroïsche jaren van de ruilverkaveling in Nederland* (Bussum, 2000); Simon van den Bergh, *Verdeeld land. De geschiedenis van de ruilverkaveling in Nederland vanuit een lokaal perspectief, 1890-1985* (Groningen/Wageningen 2004).

¹⁵ H. Cleyndert, 'de zorg voor het landschap', in H. Gorter et al., *Een halve eeuw natuurbescherming* (Amsterdam 1956) 101-109.

¹⁶ See also Kris van Koppen, *Echte natuur. Een sociaaltheoretisch onderzoek naar natuurwaardering en natuurbescherming in de moderne samenleving* (Wageningen 2002).

¹⁷ Sako Musterd and Ben de Pater, *Randstad Holland. Internationaal, regionaal, lokaal* (Assen 1994) 1.

imagination was required to discern this circle at that time because in spite of defortification and suburbanisation, the towns were still clearly separated from each other. The greater part of the green spaces between the towns, which were described by Zijlker almost a century ago, were still intact. Plesman, however, had his reasons for speaking of one integrated city because he wanted one national airport instead of the local airports of Amsterdam, the Hague and Rotterdam. The first mention of the term Randstad on paper is in a letter from KLM to the Ministry of the Interior in 1938.

Since that time there has been an ongoing debate on the existence, character and integration level of the Randstad. Most of the participants are geographers and planners. There are also some contributors who apply a historical perspective. In their article 'The rise of the Randstad', the geographer R. van Engelsdorp Gastelaars and the historian M. Wagenaar argue that in the 19th and early 20th centuries Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague displayed substantial complementarities, which would enable the formation of one integrated city.¹⁸ At that time the colonial trade was concentrated in Amsterdam, while Rotterdam was the centre for trade with Germany along the Rhine. The Hague was the political centre of the Netherlands. The banking and insurance sectors enjoyed complementary amenities and the same was the case for industrial plants.

Development, however, took the opposite direction. Kooij and Van de Laar discovered that after 1930 this complementary state increasingly turned into competition as the urban administrators in each city promoted the same activities and stimulated the development of the same functions. Although the Randstad seen from the air appears to have developed into a real integrated circle, with Utrecht in the east closing the gap, there is in fact administrative separation and competition in the economic, social and cultural domains.¹⁹ Perhaps the Randstad should be described as a bipolar agglomeration. On the one hand is the Amsterdam–Utrecht axis, including Schiphol airport, which excels in modern services. This makes this axis perform much better than the Rotterdam–the Hague one, which continues to support the significant path-dependency of bulk transport over water.

Some scholars, however, contest this bipolar model and speak of polynodality because in the cultural domain there is a long tradition of stressing the individual character and even the identity of the four great cities and at least six smaller ones.

The invention of the Green Heart

These changes in the perception of the Randstad must have had consequences on the perception of the Green Heart. It could be expected that periods

¹⁸ R. van Engelsdorp Gastelaars and M. Wagenaar, 'The rise of the Randstad 1815–1930', in H. Schmal (ed.) *Patterns of European Urbanisation since 1500* (London 1981) 229–247.

¹⁹ Pim Kooij & Paul van de Laar, 'The Randstad conurbation: a floating metropolis in the Dutch Delta', in Henk van Dijk, (ed.) *The European metropolis 1920–2000* (Internet publication, 2002: <http://hdl.handle.net/1765/1028>). See also this volume.

– and studies – where the Randstad is viewed as an integrated agglomeration will take a similar approach to the Green Heart, while the differentiation of the Randstad will result in a diversification of the Green Heart. The same is the case for the level at which planning takes place – an integrated vision implies planning at the national level, while diversification leads to planning at a provincial or local scale. In any case, history has made it clear that the Randstad has been primarily a construction of politicians and planners with no independent existence of its own.

The same is probably the case for the Green Heart. The term was coined in 1958 in a number of reports, starting with *Ontwikkeling in het westen des lands* (development in the west of the country).²⁰ The boundaries of the Green Heart were defined for the first time in 1990 in the *Vierde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra (Vinex)* (fourth report on town and country planning) on page 37, and elaborated on in *Structuurschema Groene Ruimte* from 1992 (PKB map 6, 205). Four subareas can be discerned in the Green Heart:

- the banks of the Old Rhine (Oude Rijn) including the towns Gouda, Woerden, Bodegraven and Alphen aan den Rijn.
- polders and lakes which are the result of peat digging – the area between Zoetermeer, Waddinxveen and the area south of Amsterdam centred around Mijdrecht, including the southern part of Haarlemmermeer.
- the polders Krimpenerwaard and Alblasserwaard.
- the area around the River Vecht, bordered by Amsterdam, Utrecht, Hilversum and Bussum.²¹

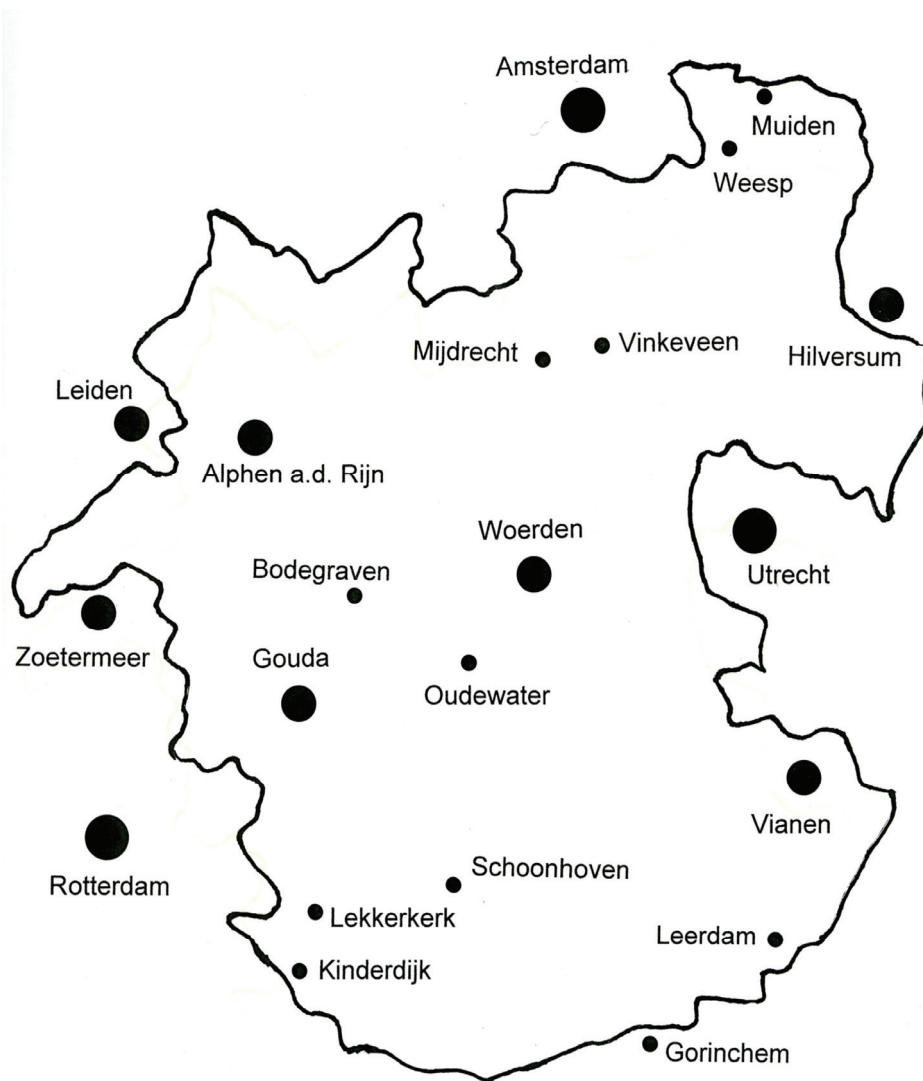
It is remarkable that the Rhine/Lek is the only river situated in the Green Heart, the Meuse and Waal being located outside this area. The greater part of the Green Heart is the result of peat digging, which started in the eleventh century. The Count of Holland and the Bishop of Utrecht were important initiators of this reclamation. An extended web of ditches and watercourses provided for the rapid discharge of water, which made the soil suitable for agriculture. Drops in the land levels regularly caused new flooding, but the use of windmills and the creation of polders provided drainage. The peat was transported to the urban markets. Peat began to be excavated from below the water level from 1530 on. This resulted in the development of large lakes. Many of these lakes were reclaimed in the 19th and 20th centuries, while others remained untouched, only to suddenly come to be considered as important areas for recreation in the 20th century.

Agriculture for the greater part implied mixed farming. Flax, hemp and oil-seed were produced in addition to livestock. In the early 20th century, however, there was a switch to livestock farming. This was caused by the increasing de-

²⁰ Werkcommissie Westen des Lands van de Rijksdienst voor het Nationale Plan, *Ontwikkeling van het westen des lands* (The Hague 1958).

²¹ Guus Borger, Adriaan Haartsen, Paul Vesters, in collaboration with Frits Horsten, *Het Groene hart. Een Hollands cultuurlandschap* (Utrecht 1997).

mand for dairy products from the fast growing cities. The landscape thus became one of meadows, which in fact meant that around 1900 all the ingredients which in contemporary perceptions are characteristic of a beautiful polder landscape were present – dikes, water, windmills and meadows with cows. However, as previously noted, this landscape was not very popular around 1900. How did this change?



Size of the Green Heart

I mentioned above that the appreciation for a man-made landscape slowly grew over time. However, this does not prove how the Green Heart could become the icon of the Dutch man-made landscapes. Perhaps it never had this position? The debate on the Green Heart in many ways resembles that on the Randstad, but there has been less research on the Green Heart so far. There are, however, some exceptions. Between 1960 and 1970 geographers from Utrecht University performed large-scale research in the central area of the Green Heart, which yielded a number of reports.²² These reports, however, focus on housing, working, suburbanisation and commuting. There has been no systematic research into the perception of green elements by the inhabitants. This element was only developed in a propagandist tourist guide by Barendse and Terlouw from 1977, in which rest and space within the Green Heart were mentioned as positive characteristics.²³

The first research centred systematically on the green function of the Green Heart dates from 1983. It was performed by the Dutch National Planning Bureau and was not very positive. Only the lakes had high value.²⁴ In the interviews the inhabitants noted the openness of the landscape in contrast to the built environment and the presence of water as positive elements.²⁵ An interesting point was that only thirty-four percent of the respondents considered the area an integrated area *ex ante*, while fifty-eight percent did so *ex post*. In the meantime they had been confronted with propaganda from organisations for the protection of nature and the environment.

Politics gave shape to the Green Heart through many reports, such as the report on the relationship between agriculture and nature, the so-called *Relatienota* (1975), and the *Natuurbeleidsplan* (1990), which elaborates an ecological structure covering the whole country and links individual nature reserves.²⁶ The organisations for the protection of nature and the environment formulated arguments for the debates. In these debates the Green Heart increasingly became a catalyst in the decision-making process. It became the arena in which all the stakeholder interests were concentrated and where the conflicts between these different interests had to be resolved.

Around 1990 the green approach got the support of a majority of politicians. The extensions of towns and cities in the Green Heart was ordered to be stopped completely and immediately. Specific reports on the Green Heart such as *Groene Hart* in 1990 and *Randstad en Groene Hart: de groene wereldstad* (green metropolis) of 1996 were distilled from general ones.²⁷ Both reports stressed the

²² Henk F.L. Ottens, *Het groene hart binnen de Randstad. Een beeld van de suburbanisatie in west-Nederland* (Assen/Amsterdam 1976).

²³ Gerard Barendse and Piet Terlouw, *Het groene hart van Nederland* (The Hague 1977)

²⁴ Staats, *Betekenis Groene Hart*, 26.

²⁵ Staats, *Betekenis Groene Hart*, 64 and 70.

²⁶ A good evaluation of these reports is provided by Marijke van Schendelen, *Natuur en ruimtelijke orde in Nederland. Een symbiotische relatie* (Rotterdam, 1997)

²⁷ Stuurgroep Groene Hart, *Groene Hart. Nadere uitwerking in het kader van de vierde nota over de ruimtelijke orde-*

need for a firm fixed border between the built and the green environment, between the red and the green. Harmony between different functions was also argued for, such as between agriculture and recreation but also between housing and working, for which 'soft locations' were defined. This approach is characteristic of the economic escape mechanism almost every report contains.

The upgrading of the Green Heart

In the reports the natural qualities of the green area are mostly defined as ecological values, based on biodiversity. However, this is usually not very explicit.²⁸ The organisations for the protection of nature and environment are not explicit either. They confine themselves to some form of experience values, such as those put forward in the book *Gras en wolken* (grass and clouds) by G. Willems, K. van Zomeren and H. Vuijsje, published in 1996. This book evokes a polder landscape with high skies, grassy meadows, clear watercourses and cows who still have their horns and are milked by hand.²⁹ Another publication of this kind is *Dwars door het groene hart: landschapsverkenningen door tijd en ruimte*, which shows through beautiful photographs an extra dimension in the threat to this idyllic situation by the built environment.³⁰ In the magazine *Groene Hart Visie*, published by the Foundation for the Green Heart, the positive aspects of the area are stressed in every issue.

We now know that this conceptualisation is recent. Previously, the need for protection of the area's potential for recreation was put forward many times. The Dutch national organization for tourism, ANWB, published a booklet *Hollands Groene Zone* in 1961 which stated that the existing recreational zones – the dunes, the beaches, the rivers, the moors, the lakes and ponds – were not sufficient to entertain a fast growing population. New areas were needed which could be found in unattractive agricultural areas in the Green Heart. This report very naively presupposed the symbiosis of agriculture and recreation. A report was published thirty-four years later in 1995 by the same organization along with the WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature, containing much grander claims.³¹ It stated that agriculture remained important but was not capable of creating an attractive landscape.³² This was primarily caused by the rise in the intensification of agriculture, the greenhouse culture and the production of bulbs.

ning (The Hague 1990); Ministerie van VROM, *Randstad en Groene Hart. De groene wereldstad* (The Hague 1996).

²⁸ A scientific stocktaking of the historical diversity of the Dutch landscape does not pay much attention to the Green Heart: S. Barends et al., *Het Nederlandse Landschap. Een historisch-geografische benadering* (Utrecht, 1986).

²⁹ Gerrit Willems, Koos van Zomeren and Herman Vuijsje, *Gras en wolken. Een beeld van het Groene Hart* (Zwolle/Woerden 1996). This publication was linked to an exhibition of paintings concerning the Green Heart.

³⁰ F. Buissink, T. Fey, M. Bemelman, *Dwars door het groene hart: landschapsverkenningen door tijd en ruimte* (Abcoude, 2001).

³¹ ANWB and WWF, *Groen Hart? Groene metropool. Recreatie en natuur in de Randstad van morgen* (Utrecht 1995).

³² *Groen Hart, Groene metropool*, 7.

The ANWB and the WWF calculated that about 60,000 hectares of new nature were needed. This could be effected by the development of more or less natural elements within the Green Heart. The creation of a green metropolis was also discussed, which in fact implied the negation of Green Heart as an integrated construct, but very soon this idea was dropped.

Since 1990 increasing attention has been paid to elements in the cultural sphere, which implied the introduction of cultural values into research, in addition to natural values. This was elaborated through the combination of three sciences – archeology, historical geography and building history as a specialization in the history of art. They focus on artefacts in the landscape which refer to human activities in the past. The landscape itself, which was also man-made, was also taken into account.³³ The historical geographers defined eleven types of landscape. The greater part of the Green Heart was indicated as peat reclamation landscape, which could also be found in other parts of the Netherlands. This was not considered as the most valuable kind of landscape and was placed in the middle of the scale.³⁴

In 1996 Borger and Vesters designed an evaluation map especially for the Green Heart in which more and less valuable areas are distinguished. Soundness, rarity and characteristicity were the main criteria for this evaluation of the man-made landscape. Characteristic elements such as mills, old factories, farms, old roads and sluices were also incorporated.

The highest values were given to the central part of the Alblasserwaard polder, the western part of the area around the River Linge, the ponds and polders north of Woerden, the Hoogmade polder east of Leiden, and the River Vecht and the Loosdrecht lakes. The lowest values were attached to the area around Zoetermeer, consisting of cleared land, and south of the Haarlemmermeer polder in which Schiphol airport is situated. Almost every part of the fringes of the Green Heart got a low score, with the exception of the Diefdijk north of Leerdam, which is part of the Dutch Waterlinie, an old defence system based on inundation. Values for nature are also incorporated into the map. The rise of biodiversity, for instance, was a consequence of peat reclamation.³⁵

The introduction of values for natural and cultural elements has increased the appreciation of the landscape of the Green Heart. At the same time, however, they pointed at the heterogeneity of the area. This was negated by the political reports of the 1990s. Policymakers, especially in the Ministry of Planning, were

³³ Borger et al., *Groene Hart*, 7; *Nota Belvédère. Beleidsnota over de relatie cultuurhistorie en ruimtelijke inrichting* (The Hague 1999). See for the relationship between this approach and that of historical science M.A.W. Gerding, (ed.), *Belvédère en de geschiedenis van de groene ruimte* (Groningen/Wageningen 2003). The relationship with geography is discussed by Guus Borger, 'Het verleden als kwaliteit van de toekomst. Pleidooi voor een nieuwe benadering', in Cees Cortie, Joos Droogleevers Fortuijn, Michiel Wagenaar, (eds.), *Stad en land. Over bewoners en woonmilieus. Opstellen aangeboden aan Rob van Engelsdorp Gastelaars bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar sociale geografie aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 2003) 110–122.

³⁴ A.J. Haartsen, A.P. de Klerk, J.A.J. Vervloet, in collaboration with G.J. Borger, *Levend verleden. Een verkenning van de cultuurhistorische betekenis van het Nederlandse landschap* (The Hague 1989)

³⁵ Borger et al., *Groene Hart*, 49.

eager to present the area as a unity and wanted it to turn into one big national park. The report *Ontwikkelingsprogramma nationaal landschap Groene Hart*, published in 1999, is a highlight in this propaganda of uniformity, which reached its zenith under Minister of Planning Jan Pronk.³⁶ The Green Heart was launched as a national landscape which had to remain untouched forever.³⁷ The report reveals an idyllic future in which agriculture, nature, recreation and culture are in harmony and reinforce each other. The ecological superstructure is also incorporated and development in the fringe areas has stopped completely. This political intention was repeated the *Viijde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening* (Fifth Report on Town and Country Planning) (2002).

This policy has had positive effects on the appreciation of the Green Heart in public opinion and by the organisations involved. In 2005 De Raad voor het Landelijk Gebied (The Council for Rural Areas) which advised the government, placed the Green Heart along with eight other areas in the premier league of national landscapes because of its rarity and importance to the national identity.³⁸

The pulverisation of the Green Heart

In the meantime, however, the tide had turned again. Since 2002, successive cabinets under Prime Minister Balkenende, consisting of Christian and liberal politicians, advocated less central planning and more room for the market. This new approach was elaborated in the *Nota Ruimte* report (Spatial policy report) by the liberal Minister of Planning Sybilla Dekker. The provinces and municipalities were given more competences in spatial affairs and the strict prohibition on building in the Green Heart disappeared. A report by the Ruimtelijk Planbureau (Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research) *Het gedeelde land van de Randstad. Ontwikkeling en toekomst van het Groene Hart* (the Future of the Green Heart), which was published soon afterwards, shows clearly what this could imply for the area.³⁹ This report suggests that the constant extension of living and working could continue in the future. There will be space for many more people. The unity of the Green Heart is denied. A distinction is drawn between urban landscapes – which derive their meaning from their nearness to the city – recreational landscapes such as lakes and natural areas, and man-made landscapes such as characteristic agricultural areas. Each of these varieties requires special management and planning, in which not only nature and culture are points of special interest, but also the economy and room for housing.⁴⁰

This meant a complete u-turn.⁴¹ Although the Netherlands Institute for Spa-

³⁶ Ministerie van VROM, *Groene Hart. Ontwikkelingsprogramma nationaal landschap Groene Hart* (The Hague 1999).

³⁷ *Groene Hart. Ontwikkelingsprogramma*, 7.

³⁸ Raad Landelijk Gebied, *Nationale landschappen: vaste koers en lange adem* (Amersfoort, 2005).

³⁹ Nico Pieterse et al., *Het gedeelde land van de randstad. Ontwikkeling en toekomst van het Groene Hart* (The Hague 2005).

⁴⁰ Pieterse, *Gedeelde land*, 140.

⁴¹ Hugo Priemus, 'Spatial memorandum 2004: a turning point in the Netherlands' spatial development policy',

tial Research is not as important as the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, these recommendations will be grist to the mill of those who want to give space to traffic, living and working instead of fostering the Green Heart as a national park.⁴² It is remarkable that this picture of a unique Green Heart could so easily become fragmented. It makes clear that, as has been put forward above, the appreciation for this area does not have deep roots in history.

Conclusion

The Green Heart as the ultimate symbol of the beauty of the Dutch polder landscape only existed for ten years. Around 1960 planners and politicians started the construction of this picture. Around 1990 it was complete and more or less generally accepted. Nevertheless, this picture was only sharp from a distance, because within the green area its diversity never completely disappeared from the minds of the people, while the adaptation of the fringes for dwelling and working also continued. Since 2005, this emphasis on diversity and room for economic activities has been growing again. This reduces the Green Heart to what it had been before 1960 – the hinterland of a number of individual cities and towns, each of which has its own plans for cultivation.

Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie 95 (2004) 578–583.

⁴² H. van der Cammen, *Groei in het Groene Hart. Een ruimtelijk-economische toekomstvisie op Midden-Holland* (Hilversum, 1991). NYFER, *Het Groene Hart, dat klopt niet* (The Hague 1996).