

The Dutch Triple Heritage Helix. A working model for the protection of the landscape

Saskia van Dockum and Leonard de Wit

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1. Introduction

The title of the [EAC symposium 2019](#) 'Archaeological sites and monuments in the care of the state' isn't very inviting for the Dutch. We will not claim that the government of the Netherlands doesn't care about the sites and monuments. It does. But it has no policy to actively use the instrument of state ownership of sites and monuments for public objectives. The registered monuments that the Dutch state actually did own have recently been sold or are in the process of being sold. A striking example is the sale of the former royal palace of Soestdijk, where Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard lived for 60 years. The only registered monuments the Dutch state retains are the ones that can be used for governmental functions, such as office buildings for civil servants.

Instead, the prime focus of Dutch heritage policy is to enable private owners to take good care of our heritage. Within this system, it is important to focus on the group of non-governmental trust organisations that have an ideological objective to preserve the heritage. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this system that has evolved over more than a century, and what kind of improvements can be made for public benefit?

2. Trust Organisations in the Netherlands

A strength of the Dutch situation is the existence of many trust organisations who specialise in the preservation of certain kinds of monuments. There are specialised trust organisations for mills, historic houses, churches and industrial heritage. Sometimes they work on a national scale. For instance, the [Hendrick de Keyser Association](#) is committed to the conservation of architecturally or historically important houses and their interiors.

The Association achieves this goal by buying and restoring real estate and subsequently offering it up for rent. Houses once procured are never sold or disposed of in other ways.

Another example is the National Society for the Preservation, Development and Exploitation of Industrial Heritage ([BOEi](#)), which is concerned with the adaptive re-use of industrial heritage. In doing so, they take on different roles, such as those of developer, investor or advisor. Other organisations work on a regional scale, such as [Oude Groninger Kerken](#), a foundation whose main objective is the upkeep of historical church buildings of the province of Groningen. It owns 66 churches, 4 church towers and 34 churchyards. Local volunteers form the backbone of this organisation.

Another notable category of local trust organisations are represented by *stadsherstel*; 'city restoration' or urban regeneration. They emerged in reaction to the post-war wave of modernisation, which put historic city centres under a lot of pressure. City restoration organisations bought premises in almost all inner cities, in order to restore and maintain them and to create exploitable heritage. These organisations started out as private initiatives, but along the way they were increasingly supported and facilitated by local authorities and the national government.

All the above-mentioned organisations have a primary focus on monument care. Obviously, that is not so much the case with trust organisations who engage in nature preservation. Organisations such as [Natuurmonumenten](#) and the provincial landscape organisations ([Provinciale Landschappen](#)) started buying land early in the 20th century. Nature conservation was a primary concern. However, since they also bought many estates, farms, defensive works, and – more or less accidentally – archaeological sites, these organisations are now among the major heritage owners of the Netherlands. Luckily, they all have incorporated a (secondary) heritage objective into their statutes and corporate policies. Recently, these organisations started to present themselves more frequently as heritage associations.

In this article we'll elaborate on the potential of the organisations for the benefit of heritage protection. In particular, we will examine the case of Utrechts Landschap Foundation.

3. Utrechts Landschap Foundation

Within the Dutch field of trust organisations it looks like we have a missing link. We seem to be lacking a trust that specialises in archaeological sites and features. This might not ultimately be so problematic if organisations for nature protection take up this task as an integral part of their property management. In that respect, we anticipate this role will be taken by [Utrechts Landschap](#), not least because it is being led by an archaeologist, who was once the director of the State Agency for Archaeology.

Utrechts Landschap is a Dutch regional foundation focused on the conservation of natural and non-natural heritage in the Province of Utrecht. Utrecht is centrally located in the Netherlands, where the delta, if you go from east to west, gradually falls below sea level. In this Dutch delta, nature and heritage are closely linked in diverse landscapes.

The archetype of Dutch landscape is that of the 19th century: rich and diverse, with limited industrial activity, cities that only just grew beyond their medieval walls and an infrastructure that mainly followed the ancient road patterns. It is an artificial landscape of closed agricultural systems, polders and vast forests. While much of this landscape feels quite natural, the first dykes and polders in the Netherlands date from at least the Middle Ages.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the protection of nature, landscape and heritage in the Netherlands became a real issue. Protection started because the familiar, cherished and historically layered landscape started to disappear rapidly. Cities grew, road and rail infrastructure cut the country in pieces and the countryside was more and more intensively planned and used. In particular, wildlife biologists and botanists started to take care of the protection of nature, while urban planners and architects took the initiative to protect landscape and heritage.

[Natuurmonumenten](#) (the Dutch foundation for protection of natural heritage) was founded in 1905 when the Naardermeer (a lake near Amsterdam) was threatened with being turned into a landfill site. Another foundation, Hendrick de Keyser, orientated on the built heritage, was founded in 1918. Utrechts Landschap, the organisation we take as an example here, was founded in 1927 when the forests of the 17th-century estate Eykenstein were threatened with being sold to a project developer. Dozens of villas were planned in this area.

The model of protection in those days was simple: the foundations, supported by donations from their members (often affluent merchants, industrialists or other members of the elite), became owners of the threatened sites. And it worked. The acquisition by the newly founded trusts protected both sites and many more. Today, they are still places of exceptional natural beauty visited by many. In those days there was still no legal protection. However, in 1875, the Dutch government took the first steps to provide financial subsidies for the restoration of monuments.

It is only since the 1950s that cultural and natural heritage have been afforded legal protection in the Netherlands. But in our view *legal* protection and governmental *subsidies* are not enough. Heritage is best secured by motivated owners with diverse forms of income and must be managed with expertise. Ownership is decisive for the conservation of natural landscapes and monuments in their landscape context. This is the reason that Utrechts Landschap's promise to society can be realised: protection for eternity.

Both the forests of Eykenstein and the Naardermeer also show how nature and heritage go hand-in-hand in the Netherlands. The Naardermeer is an old peat extraction site, while the forests of Eykenstein have a historical layering dating back to prehistoric times and includes, among others, Celtic fields, a 17th-century house and a 19th-century park.

For Utrechts Landschap, the first land purchases were primarily done with a view to nature conservation, but quite soon the foundation became more aware of the cultural heritage embedded in the landscape and bought land with archaeological sites and historical buildings as well, and started to acquire heritage also for its cultural value. For example, the Grebbeberg, with an Iron Age fort, or the castle of Loenersloot, and brickworks along the River Rhine. Utrechts Landschap now owns 6000 hectares of land, and approximately 200 buildings and archaeological sites, almost 50% of which are listed national monuments. The other half is generally protected by other state authorities, such as municipalities. The ownership is still growing.

One of the biggest purchases was the former airbase at Soesterberg, bought by Utrechts Landschap in 2018. It comprises 400 hectares of nature, mainly dry grasslands and sandy soils, with habitats for rare and even newly discovered insect species, birds and larger fauna. The airbase, however, also includes all kinds of monumental (but not legally protected) military and cold war remains, with airplane shelters, underground ammunition bunkers and a 4km long runway.



Figure 2: Hardened aircraft shelter on the former airbase Soesterberg

4. Triple Heritage Helix

In order to achieve its goals, the organisation co-operates with public governments and civil society. This co-operation forms the DNA of heritage conservation; we therefore name it the 'triple heritage helix'. In this triple helix, the three parties all play their essential role (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The triple heritage helix

Civil society provides the justification for heritage conservation. Although reliable data are sparse, we can with certainty say that, in a province with a 1.2 million population, Utrechts Landschap has more than one million visitors to its monuments and nature reserves every year, possibly more than double that figure. Almost 27,000 local members support the foundation financially, and membership increased by 7% in 2018. In addition, Utrechts Landschap has more than 600 volunteers that contribute to activities at least twice a month. Some volunteers also have very great expertise in certain areas that they share (e.g. botanists, historians, archivists, etc.). More than 60 regional companies have a business membership, and that number is growing too.

Government in the first place provides boundary conditions; the policies that determine how to deal with the environment, and the funding for those things that are considered of public value. In the case of nature and heritage protection, not only the legislation around legal protection is important, but also the policies for spatial planning, agriculture and water management, among others. The government also gives subsidies for the management of heritage and nature. Furthermore, the government facilitates access to experts, nature education and public debate. They have a strong influence on the public agenda.

In this triple heritage helix, **Utrechts Landschap** is the stable factor in conservation that provides long-term continuity and cohesion, and the integral vision that includes nature, landscape and heritage. The foundation has sufficient size to employ adequate expertise in nature and heritage management and policy development, but is also sufficiently small to be agile and flexible. As a regional organisation, Utrechts Landschap is close to, and recognisable by, inhabitants, regional politicians and civil servants.

The financing of Utrechts Landschap reflects the triple helix (Figure 3). From the early days onwards, the organisation very much depended on donations from members. In later years, Utrechts Landschap also received large financial support from the national government, for instance, for the acquisition of areas of natural importance, although due to State Aid Regulation, that is no longer allowed. In the case of the Soesterberg

airbase, it is interesting to note that when the discussions about the airbase started more than 15 years ago, it was foreseen that the government would transfer the ownership of the property to Utrechts Landschap for a symbolic amount. However, in the end, the foundation paid almost 5 million euro. A serious setback, but with support of a Lottery and hundreds of individual donors Utrechts Landschap was able to buy the airbase.

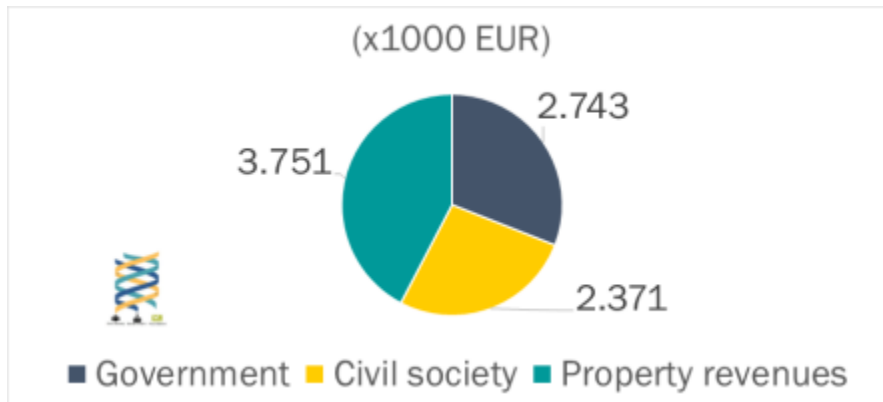


Figure 3: The funding of

Utrechts Landschap in 2017

A closer look at how financing of the foundation is built up shows that in 2017 there was a turnover of approximately 8 million euro. One-third of this turnover came from the civil society in the form of membership fees, donations and sponsorship. In this category, endowments are also an important source of income. Government subsidies for the management of (natural) heritage provided another third of the financial means. The remaining third of the income is generated by activities related to the ownership of land and real estate, for example, leasing of land, renting out properties and managing financial assets.

In the triple heritage helix, the foundation successfully protects heritage, provides space for recreation and education, develops nature and increases biodiversity and promotes sustainable economic activities. Utrechts Landschap will keep on doing that in the future, with support from society and government. The support from society is increasing, but governments (ir)regularly change. To make the triple helix work, it is important that government:

1. Has a positive attitude towards private heritage protection
2. Takes responsibility for legislation and regulation at the appropriate government level
3. Gives some form of continuity, without too large policy changes
4. Provides a stable and predictable financial support structure
5. Arranges taxation policies that promote donations, sponsoring and endowments
6. Require limited bureaucracy
7. Provides funding for large research projects

The wolf, which disappeared together with our 19th-century landscape, recently returned to the Netherlands. In Utrecht there have been several sightings in the last year. Utrechts Landschap welcomes this return of the wolf as apex predator in the ecosystem. Nevertheless, this is also a real challenge in a densely populated country such as the Netherlands. The triple helix debates are heated, but will definitely provide a solution, as it works for heritage protection.