

Progress needs Participation - Argumentation for Natura 2000 in The Netherlands



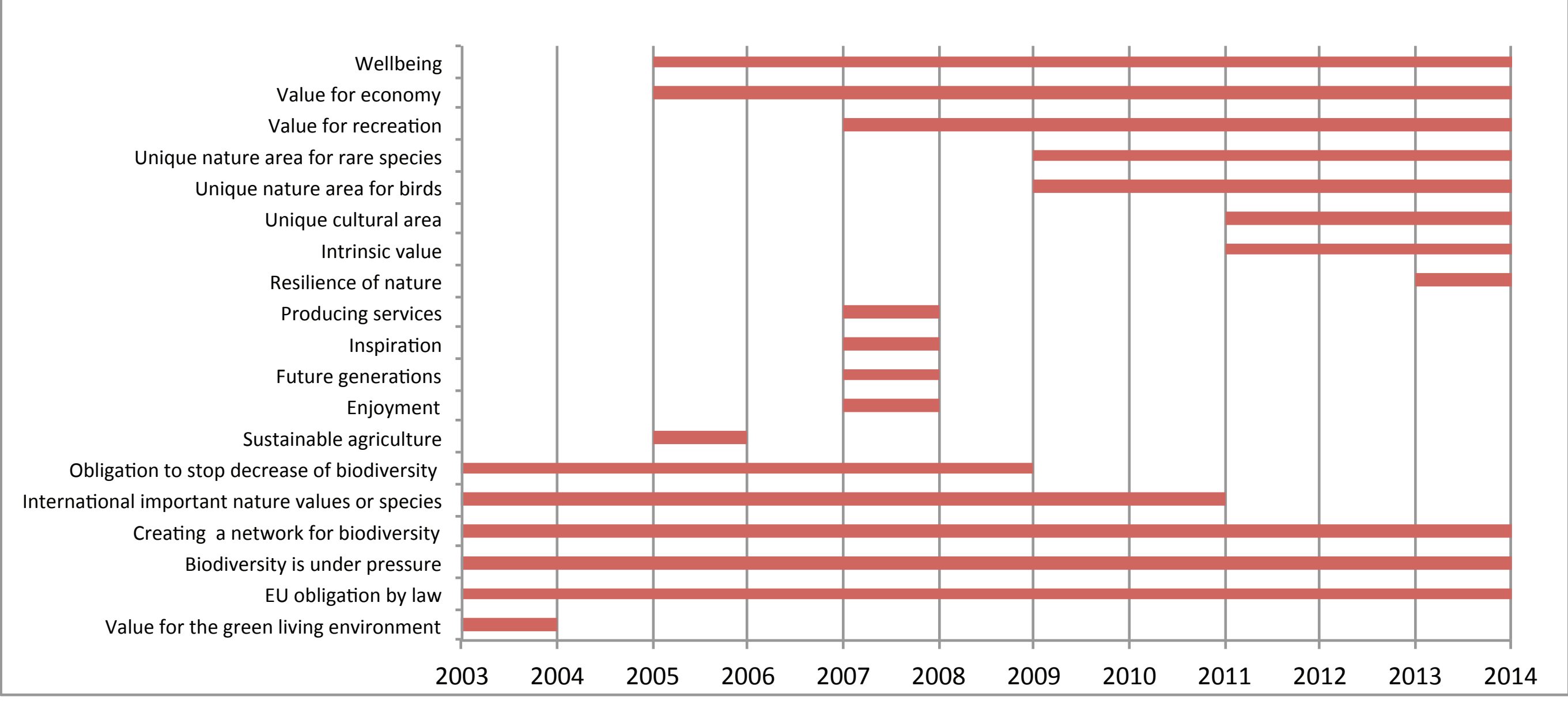
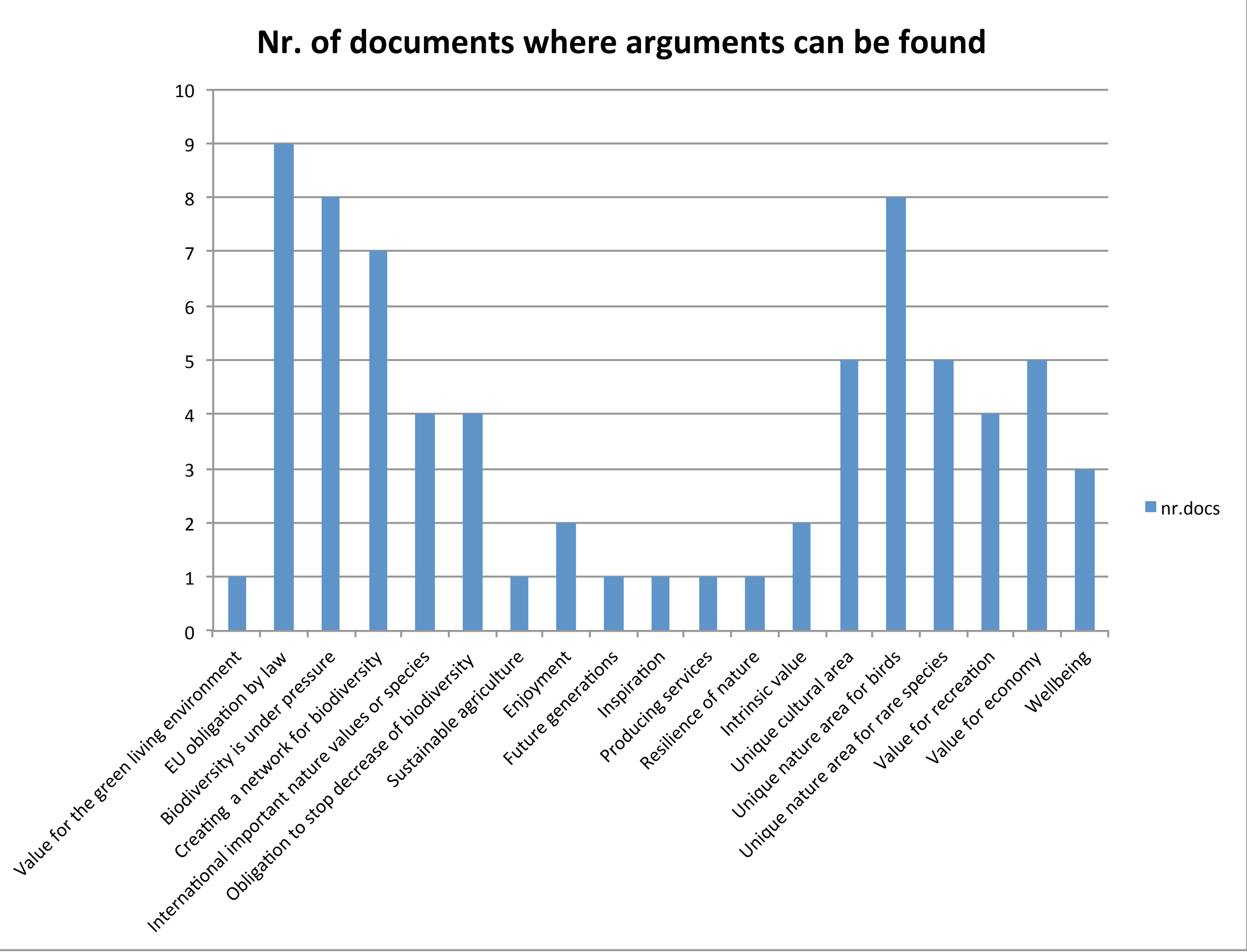
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Context

In the Netherlands, the national government used the obligation to commit to EU legislation as a powerful argument during the first phase of Natura 2000 implementation. However, this argument resulted in resistance against and concern about N2000 hampering other interests like economic development. During the designation process more stakeholders were involved and participatory processes have been set-up to gain stakeholders’ support. New and a broader range of arguments other than legal and social obligation emerged, including those stressing the value of services provided by nature (recreation, future generations). This case study focuses on the site designation process of Natura 2000 at the national level as well as on regional level in Polder Zeevang and Oostelijke Vechtplassen during the designation and management planning processes that have taken place over a period from 2003 until 2014.



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Framing

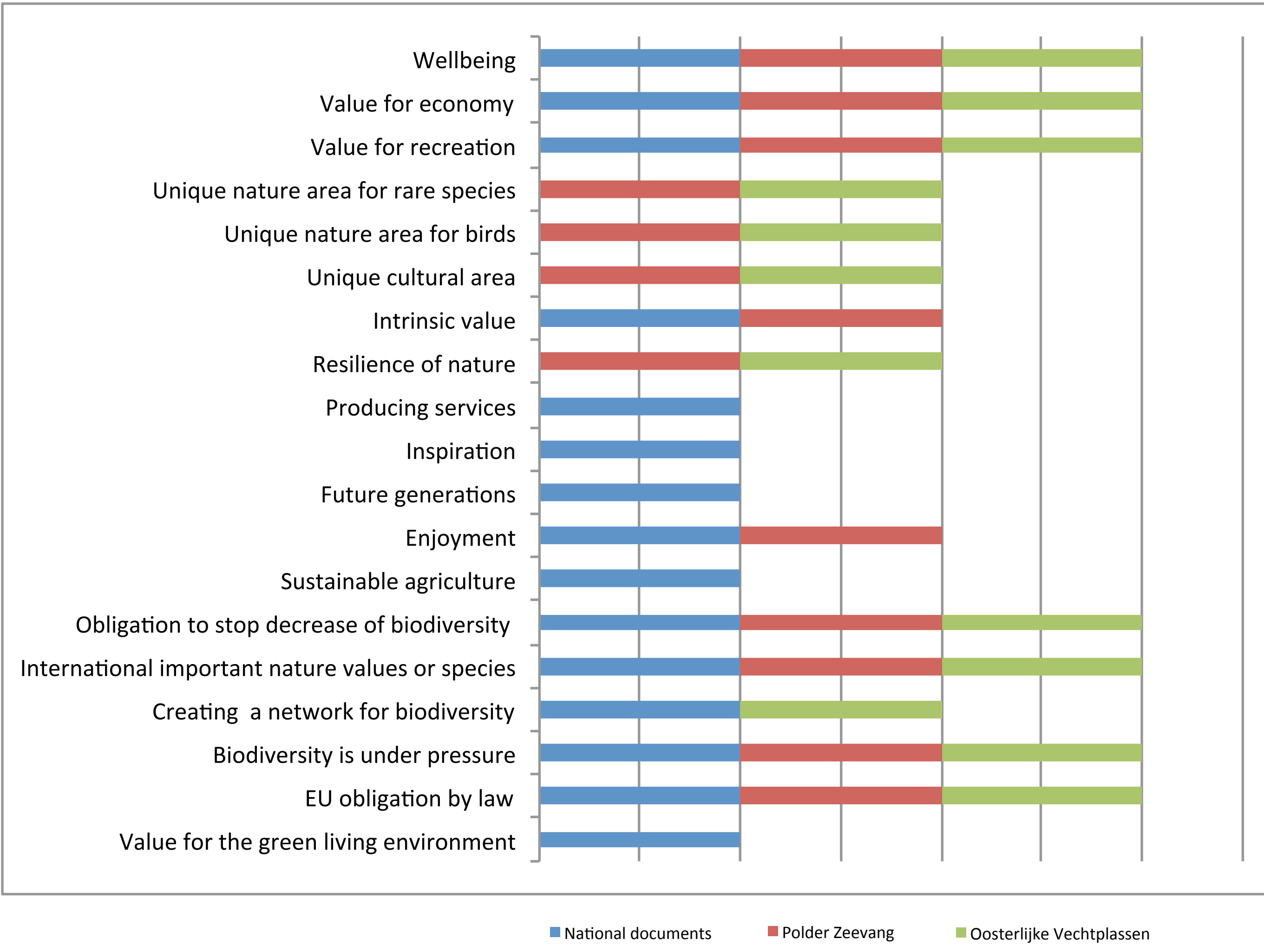
The beginning of the designation processes was a very internal, closed set of deliberations at the national level. The arguments that the national government used characteristically justified the government’s actions and forced stakeholders’ cooperation. Later in the process, after a wide public debate, argumentation shifted from an internal to a more external scope, addressing more regional and local actors, e.g. provinces, business, farmers, and citizens. The aim of argumentation changed from making other parties realise they had no choice but cooperate to winning them over and framing changed from general and rather negative (not cooperating will have consequences) to more specific and positive, emphasizing benefits of Natura 2000.

Effectiveness

The argument of the legal obligation proved to be effective. Many counter-arguments that were put forward in the consultation rounds were put aside because the regulation and the designation of sites were already accepted in an earlier stage by the member states and the European Commission. The counter-argument that has been most effective was that Natura 2000 did hamper economic development, which was born out of the societal agitation following to the national governmental approach. Using this counter-argument did not affect the designation of sites, but it was effective in influencing nature policy in The Netherlands and resulted in the entire process adopting a more deliberative approach, involving many local and regional stakeholders.



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Lesson learned

Referring to EU law in a forced way can have side effects such as societal agitation which influence politics and policy implementation processes.

When designing policy implementation processes, also the different argumentation guiding the different phases of implementation should be prepared.

Early recognizing counter-arguments brought forward by stakeholders can be used to evaluate and, if necessary, adjust the policy process in-time.



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